

HOW THE MOSCOW PATRIARCHATE FELL FROM GRACE

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INTRODUCTION

It was always the Bolsheviks' plan to destroy the Russian Orthodox Church from within. And so in 1922 the first pro-Soviet schism took place – the so-called renovationists or “Living Church”. But the people in their great majority rejected the renovationists, and the Patriarchal Church under Patriarch Tikhon remained unvanquished until the death of the patriarch in April, 1925. Two years later, however, in 1927, the second, “neo-renovationist” schism took place. And this time the official church fell, together with the majority of the people...

This is an account of how this fall took place...

1. METROPOLITAN PETER OF KRUTITSA

After the death of Patriarch Tikhon in April, 1925 (almost certainly he was poisoned), and the arrest and imprisonment of the patriarchal locum tenens, Metropolitan Peter of Krutitsa, in December, True Orthodoxy in Russia was without a first-hierarchy living in freedom and able to administer the Church. Metropolitan Peter had appointed deputies in the event of his imprisonment, and by the middle of 1926, one of those deputies, Metropolitan Sergius (Stragorodsky) of Nizhni-Novgorod, had established himself as the leading Russian hierarchy in freedom. Sergius had fallen away from the Church into renovationism in 1922, and so was suspected by many – the famous Elder Nektary of Optina said that “the poison of renovationism is in him still”. Moreover, he was neither patriarch nor patriarchal locum tenens, but only a deputy of Metropolitan Peter. As such, he did not have the authority to undertake any important steps in Church matters without the express authorization of Metropolitan Peter...

The events that followed the arrest and imprisonment of Metropolitan Peter in December, 1925 are not at all clear. We know that a struggle for power took place between a group of bishops led by Archbishop Gregory (Yatskovsky) of Yekaterinburg (Sverdlovsk), on the one hand, and Metropolitan Sergius of Nizhni-Novgorod (Gorky), on the other, a struggle which Sergius eventually won. It is usually considered that the Grigorians were the agents of the atheist authorities, whose plot was foiled by Sergius, and this may well have been the case. However, it may be closer to the truth to say that the authorities were playing the two groups off against each other, and would have been happy with either outcome provided it gave them a more malleable church leader than Metropolitan Peter.

According to the more generally accepted version of events, on December 14, although unable to leave Nizhni-Novgorod at the time, Metropolitan Sergius, without consulting with any other senior bishop, announced that he was taking upon himself the rights and duties of the deputy of the Patriarchal locum tenens. However, he was prevented by the OGPU from coming to Moscow, many bishops refused to recognize him (for example, Archbishop Andrew of Ufa), and on December 22, 1925, a group of nine bishops led by Archbishop Gregory gathered at the Donskoy monastery.

The Grigorians, as they came to be called, gave a brief description of the succession of first-hierarchical power since 1917, and then declared concerning Metropolitan Peter: “It was not pleasing to the Lord to bless the labours of this hierarchy. During his rule disorders and woes only deepened in the Holy Church... In view of this we... have decided to elect

a Higher Temporary Church Council for the carrying out of the everyday affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church and for the preparation of a canonically correct Council... Moreover, we have firmly decided not to enter into any relationship or communion with the renovationists and renovationism in all its forms... Instead, we consider it our duty to witness to our complete legal obedience to the powers that be of the Government of the USSR and our faith in its good will and the purity of its intentions in serving the good of the people. We in turn ask them to believe in our loyalty and readiness to serve the good of the same people..." These words clearly revealed the pro-Soviet inspiration of the group. The next day they sought legalisation from the GPU, and ten days later, on January 2, 1926, they received it. On January 7, *Izvestia* published an interview with Archbishop Gregory thanking the authorities.

On January 14, Metropolitan Sergius wrote to Archbishop Gregory demanding an explanation for his usurpation of power. Gregory replied on January 22, saying that while they recognized the rights of the three locum tenentes, "we know no conciliar decision concerning you, and we do not consider the transfer of administration and power by personal letter to correspond to the spirit and letter of the holy canons." This was a valid point which was later to be made by several catacomb bishops. But Sergius wrote again on January 29, impeaching Gregory and his fellow bishops, banning them from serving and declaring all their ordinations, appointments, awards, etc., since December 22 to be invalid.

It was a moot question whether Sergius had the power to act in this way. On February 26, Archbishop Hilarion of Verey wrote to Sergius from prison: "The temporary ecclesiastical organ must unite, and not divide the episcopate, it is not a judge or punisher of dissidents – that will be the Council." However, on March 18 Sergius wrote to Metropolitan Peter attempting to justify his "rights" as "first bishop", able to ban bishops even before the Council. And he gave the similar actions of Patriarch Tikhon and Metropolitan Peter himself as precedents. But here he "forgot", as he was to "forget" again later, that his own position was much weaker than that of the Patriarch or Metropolitan Peter, each of whom were recognized in their time by the majority of the episcopate as the true head of the Russian Church.

On January 29, three Grigorian bishops wrote to Metropolitan Peter claiming that they had not known, in their December meeting, that he had transferred his rights to Sergius, and asking him to bless their administration. The free access the Grigorians had to Peter during this period, and the fact that Sergius was at first prevented from coming to Moscow, suggests that the GPU, while not opposing Sergius, at first favoured the Gregorians as their best hope for dividing the Church.

On February 1 the Grigorians obtained an interview with Metropolitan Peter in prison, in which they asked him to annul Sergius' rights as his deputy and, in view of Sergius' inability to come to Moscow from Nizhni and the refusal of the other deputies, Michael of Kiev and Joseph of Rostov, to accept the deputyship, to hand over the administration of the Church to them. Fearing anarchy in the Church, Metropolitan Peter went part of the way to blessing the Grigorians' undertaking. However, instead of the Grigorian Synod, he created a temporary "college" to administer the Church's everyday affairs consisting of Archbishop Gregory, Archbishop Nicholas (Dobronravov) of Vladimir and Archbishop Demetrius (Belikov) of Tomsk, who were well-known for their firmness.

The Grigorians and Tuchkov, who was present at the meeting, were silent about the fact that Nicholas was in prison and that Demetrius could not come to Moscow. This conspiracy of silence again suggests that they were in league with each other.

Tuchkov proceeded to a further deception: he agreed to summon Demetrius from Tomsk, and even showed Peter the telegram – but never sent it. When Peter, feeling something was wrong, asked for the inclusion of Metropolitan Arsenius (Stadnitsky) in the college of bishops, Tuchkov again agreed and promised to sign Peter's telegram to him. Again, the telegram was not sent.

It has been argued by Lev Regelson that Metropolitan Peter's action in appointing deputies was not canonical, and created misunderstandings that were to be ruthlessly exploited later by Metropolitan Sergius. A chief hierarch does not have the right to transfer the fullness of his power to another hierarch as if it were a personal inheritance: only a Council representing the whole Local Church can elect a leader to replace him. Patriarch Tikhon's appointment of three locum tenentes was an exceptional measure, but one which was nevertheless entrusted to him by – and therefore could claim the authority of – the Council of 1917-18. However, the Council made no provision for what might happen in the event of the death or removal of these three. In such an event, therefore, patriarchal authority ceased, temporarily, in the Church; and there was no canonical alternative, until the convocation of another Council, but for each bishop to govern his diocese independently while maintaining links with neighbouring dioceses, in accordance with the Patriarch's ukaz no. 362 of November 7/20, 1920.

In defence of Metropolitan Peter it may be said that it is unlikely that he intended to transfer the fullness of his power, but only the day-to-day running of the administrative machine. In fact he explicitly said this later, in a letter to Sergius of January 2, 1930. Moreover, in his declaration of December 6, 1925, he had given instructions that in the event of his

arrest “the raising of my name, as patriarchal locum tenens, remains obligatory during Divine services.” This was something that Patriarch Tikhon had not insisted upon when he transferred the fullness of his power to Metropolitan Agathangelus in 1922. It suggests that Metropolitan Peter did not exclude the possibility that his deputy might attempt to seize power from him just as the renovationists had seized power from the patriarch and his locum tenens in 1922, and was taking precautions against just such a possibility.

The critical distinction here is that whereas the patriarchal locum tenens has, de jure, all the power of a canonically elected Patriarch and need relinquish his power only to a canonically convoked Council of the whole local Church, the deputy of the locum tenens has no such fullness of power and must relinquish such rights as he has at any time that the Council or the locum tenens requires it. Nevertheless, the important question remains: why did Metropolitan Peter not invoke ukaz no. 362 and announce the decentralization of the Church’s administration at the time of his arrest? Probably for two important reasons:

(1) The restoration of the patriarchate was one of the main achievements of the Moscow Council of 1917-18, and had proved enormously popular. Its dissolution might well have dealt a major psychological blow to the masses, who were not always educated enough to understand that the Church could continue to exist either in a centralized (though not papist) form, as it had in the East from 312 to 1917, or in a decentralized form, as in the catacomb period before Constantine the Great and during the iconoclast persecution of the eighth and ninth centuries.

(2) The renovationists – still the major threat to the Church in Metropolitan Peter’s eyes – did not have a patriarch, and their organization was, as we have seen, closer to the synodical, state-dependent structure of the pre-revolutionary Church. The presence or absence of a patriarch or his substitute was therefore a major sign of the difference between the true Church and the false for the uneducated believer.

There is another important factor which should be mentioned here. Under the rules imposed upon the Church administration by Peter the Great in the eighteenth century, the Ruling Synod was permitted to move bishops from one see to another, and even to retire, ban or defrock them, in a purely administrative manner. This was contrary to the Holy Canons of the Church, which envisage the defrocking of a bishop only as a result of a full canonical trial, to which the accused bishop is invited to attend three times. Peter’s rules made the administration of the Church similar to that of a government department – which is precisely what the Church was according to his Reglament. It enabled the State to exert pressure on

the Church to move and remove bishops in the speediest and most efficient manner, without the checks and balances – and delays – that following the Holy Canons would have involved. This was bad enough in itself, even when the State was kindly disposed towards the Church. It was catastrophic when the State became the enemy of the Church after 1917... Now Patriarch Tikhon, while not rescinding Peter's rules, had opposed the pressure of the State, on the one hand, and had preserved the spirit of sobornost', or conciliarity, on the other, consulting his fellow bishops and the people as far as possible. But the danger remained that if the leadership of the Church were assumed by a less holy man, then the combination of the uncanonical, Petrine government, on the one hand, and an increase of pressure from the State, on the other, would lead to disaster...

2. THE RISE OF METROPOLITAN SERGIUS

On February 4, 1926, Metropolitan Peter fell ill and was admitted to the prison hospital. A war for control of the Church now developed between the Grigorians and Metropolitan Sergius. The Grigorians pointed to Sergius' links with Rasputin and the "Living Church": "On recognizing the Living Church, Metropolitan Sergius took part in the sessions of the HCA, recognized the lawfulness of married bishops and twice-married priests, and blessed this lawlessness. Besides, Metropolitan Sergius sympathized with the living church council of 1923, did not object against its decisions, and therefore confessed our All-Russian Archpastor and father, his Holiness Patriarch Tikhon, to be 'an apostate from the true ordinances of Christ and a betrayer of the Church', depriving him of his patriarchal rank and monastic calling. True, Metropolitan Sergius later repented of these terrible crimes and was forgiven by the Church, but that does not mean that he should stand at the head of the Church's administration."

All this was true; but these arguments were not strong enough to maintain the Grigorians' position, which deteriorated as several bishops declared their support for Sergius. In particular, Archbishop Hilarion of Verey, who had been released from prison for talks with the GPU, refused to recognise the Grigorians – for which he received an extension of his sentence. Another bishop who strongly rejected the Grigorians was Basil of Priluki.

Yaroslavsky, Tuchkov and the OGPU had already succeeded in creating a schism between Metropolitan Sergius and the Grigorians. They now tried to fan the flames of schism still higher by releasing Metropolitan Agathangelus, the second candidate for the post of patriarchal locum tenens, from exile and persuading him to declare his assumption of the post of locum tenens, which he did officially from Perm on April 18. They also decided, at a meeting in the Kremlin on April 24, to "strengthen the third Tikhonite hierarchy – the Temporary Higher Ecclesiastical Council headed by Archbishop Gregory, as an independent unit."

On April 22, Metropolitan Sergius wrote to Metropolitan Peter at the Moscow GPU, as a result of which Peter withdrew his support from the Grigorians, signing his letter to Sergius: "the penitent Peter". It would be interesting to know whether Sergius knew of Metropolitan Agathangelus' declaration four days earlier when he wrote to Peter. Hieromonk Damascene (Orlovsky) claims that Agathangelus did not tell Sergius until several days later. But the evidence is ambiguous; for Gubonin gives two different dates for the letter from Agathangelus to Sergius telling the latter of his assumption of the rights of the patriarchal locum tenens: April 18 and 25. If the later date is correct, then Sergius cannot be accused of

hiding this critical information from Metropolitan Peter. If, however, the earlier date is correct, then Sergius already knew of Agathangelus' assumption of the rights of locum tenens, and his keeping quiet about this very important fact in his letter to Metropolitan Peter was highly suspicious. For he must have realized that Metropolitan Agathangelus, having returned from exile (he actually arrived in his see of Yaroslavl on April 27), had every right to assume power as the eldest hierarch and the only patriarchal locum tenens named by Patriarch Tikhon who was in freedom at that time. In view of the very ruthless behaviour now displayed by Metropolitan Sergius, it seems likely that he deliberately decided to hide the information about Metropolitan Agathangelus' return from Metropolitan Peter.

In fact, with the appearance of Metropolitan Agathangelus the claims of *both* the Grigorians *and* Sergius to supreme power in the Church collapsed. But Sergius, having tasted of power, was not about to relinquish it so quickly; and just as Metropolitan Agathangelus' rights as locum tenens were swept aside by the renovationists in 1922, so now the same hierarch was swept aside again by the former renovationist Sergius. The chronology of events reveals how the leadership of the Russian Church was usurped for the second time...

On April 30, Sergius wrote to Agathangelus rejecting his claim to the rights of the patriarchal locum tenens on the grounds that Peter had not resigned his post. In this letter Sergius claims that he and Peter had exchanged opinions on Agathangelus' letter in Moscow on April 22 – but neither Sergius nor Peter mention Agathangelus in the letters they exchanged on that day and which are published by Gubonin. Therefore it seems probable that Peter's decision not to resign his post was based on ignorance of Agathangelus' appearance on the scene. Indeed, there can be little doubt that if he had known he would have immediately handed over the administration of the Church to Agathangelus.

On May 13, Agathangelus met Sergius in Moscow, where, according to Sergius, they agreed that if Peter's trial (for unlawfully handing over his authority to the Grigorians) ended in his condemnation, Sergius would hand over his authority to Agathangelus. However, Sergius was simply playing for time, in order to win as many bishops as possible to his side. And on May 16, he again wrote to Agathangelus, in effect reneging on his agreement of three days before: "If the affair ends with Metropolitan Peter being acquitted or freed, I will hand over to *him* my authority, while your eminence will then have to conduct discussions with Metropolitan Peter himself. But if the affair ends with his condemnation, you will be given the opportunity to take upon yourself the initiative of raising the question of bringing Metropolitan Peter to a church trial. When Metropolitan Peter will be given over to a trial, you can present your rights, as the eldest

[hierarchy] to the post of Deputy of Metropolitan Peter, and when the court will declare the latter deprived of his post, you will be the second candidate to the *locum tenency* of the patriarchal throne after Metropolitan Cyril.”

In other words, Sergius in a cunning and complicated way rejected Agathangelus’ claim to be the lawful head of the Russian Church, although this claim was now stronger than Metropolitan Peter’s (because he was in prison and unable to rule the Church) and *much* stronger than Sergius’.

On May 20, Agathangelus sent a telegram to Sergius: “You promised to send a project to the Bishops concerning the transfer to me of the authorizations of ecclesiastical power. Be so kind as to hurry up.” On the same day Sergius replied: “Having checked your information, I am convinced that you have no rights; [I will send you] the details by letter. I ardently beseech you: do not take the decisive step.” On May 21, Agathangelus sent another telegram threatening to publish the agreement he had made with Sergius and which he, Sergius, had broken. On May 22, Sergius wrote to Peter warning him not to recognize Agathangelus’ claims (the letter, according to Hieromonk Damascene (Orlovsky), was delivered personally by Tuchkov, which shows which side the OGPU was on!). However, Peter ignored Sergius’ warning and wrote to Agathangelus on May 22 (and again on May 23), congratulating him on his assumption of the rights of patriarchal locum tenens and assuring him of his loyalty.

At this point Sergius’ last real canonical grounds for holding on to power – the support of Metropolitan Peter – collapsed. But Agathangelus only received this letter on May 31, a (OGPU-engineered?) delay that proved to be decisive for the fortunes of the Russian Church. For on May 24, after Sergius had again written rejecting Agathangelus’ claims, the latter wrote: “Continue to rule the Church... For the sake of the peace of the Church I propose to resign the office of locum tenens.” On the same day Sergius, savagely pressing home his advantage, wrote to the administration of the Moscow diocese demanding that Agathangelus be tried by the hierarchs then in Moscow. When Agathangelus eventually received Peter’s letter (which was confirmed by a third one dated June 9), he wrote to Sergius saying that he would send him a copy of the original and informing him that he had accepted the chancellery of the patriarchal locum tenens. And he asked him to come to Moscow so that he could take over power from him. But it was too late; Sergius was already in control of the Church’s administration and refused to come to Moscow saying that he had signed a promise not to leave Nizhni-Novgorod (although he had gone to Moscow only two weeks before!). And on May 30 / June 12, in a letter to Metropolitan Peter, Agathangelus finally renounced all claims to the *locum tenency*.

Why did Metropolitan Agathangelus renounce the post of locum tenens at this point? The reason he gave to Sergius was his poor health; but some further light is shed on this question by Schema-Bishop Peter (Ladygin), who wrote that when Metropolitan Agathangelus returned from exile, “everyone began to come to him. Then Tuchkov with some archimandrite came to Agathangelus and began to demand from him that he hand over his administration to Sergius. Metropolitan Agathangelus did not agree to this. Then Tuchkov told him that he would now go back into exile. Then Agathangelus, because of his health and since he had already been three years in exile, resigned from the administration [the post of locum tenens] and left it to Peter of Krutitsa as the lawful [locum tenens] until the second candidate, Metropolitan Cyril, should return from exile. I heard about this when I personally went to him in Yaroslavl and he himself explained his situation to me. And he said that the canonical administration was now really in the hands of Cyril, and temporarily, until the return of Cyril, with Metropolitan Peter. He did not recognize Sergius or Gregory...”

Bishop Peter goes on to write: “I asked him: ‘What must we do in the future if neither Cyril nor Peter will be around? Who must we then commemorate?’ He said: ‘There is still the canonical Metropolitan Joseph, formerly of Uglich, who is now in Leningrad. He was appointed by his Holiness Patriarch Tikhon as a candidate in case the Patriarch, I, Cyril and Anthony [Khrapovitsky] died.’” Bishop Peter for a time commemorated Metropolitan Agathangelus as locum tenens.

The astonishing extent of Sergius’ usurpation of power is revealed in his fifth letter to Agathangelus, dated June 13, in which he refused to submit even to Metropolitan Peter insofar as the latter, “having transferred to me, albeit temporarily, nevertheless in full, the rights and obligations of the locum tenens, and himself being deprived of the possibility of being reliably informed of the state of ecclesiastical affairs, can neither bear responsibility for the course of the latter, nor, a fortiori, meddle in their administration... I cannot look on the instructions of Metropolitan Peter that have come out of prison as other than instructions or, rather, *as the advice of a person without responsibility* [italics mine – V.M.].”

A sergianist source comments on this letter: “It turns out that, once having appointed a deputy for himself, Metropolitan Peter no longer had the right to substitute another for him, whatever he declared. This ‘supple’ logic, capable of overturning even common sense, witnessed to the fact that Metropolitan Sergius was not going to depart from power under any circumstances.”

Sergius also said that Agathangelus was given over to a hierarchical

trial for his anticanonical act, for greeting which Metropolitan Peter “himself becomes a participant in it and is also subject to punishment”. In other words, Sergius, though only Metropolitan Peter’s deputy as locum tenens for as long as the latter recognized him as such, was not only usurping the rights of the full (and not simply deputy) locum tenens, but was also threatening to bring to trial, on the charge of attempting to usurp the locum tenancy, two out of the only three men who could canonically lay claim to the post!

3. THE CHURCH DECENTRALIZED

On June 7, 1926 a group of bishops imprisoned in the former monastery of Solovki in the White Sea issued an epistle that squarely faced up to the problems of Church-State relations: "The signatories of the present declaration are fully aware of how difficult the establishment of mutually reliable relations between the Church and the State in the conditions of present-day actuality are, and they do not consider it possible to be silent about it. It would not be right, it would not correspond to the dignity of the Church, and would therefore be pointless and unpersuasive, if they began to assert that between the Orthodox Church and the State power of the Soviet republics there were no discrepancies of any kind. But this discrepancy does not consist in what political suspicion wishes to see or the slander of the enemies of the Church points to. The Church is not concerned with the redistribution of wealth or in its collectivization, since She has always recognized that to be the right of the State, for whose actions She is not responsible. The Church is not concerned, either, with the political organization of power, for She is loyal with regard to the government of all the countries within whose frontiers She has members. She gets on with all forms of State structure from the eastern despotism of old Turkey to the republics of the North-American States. This discrepancy lies in the irreconcilability of the religious teaching of the Church with materialism, the official philosophy of the Communist Party and of the government of the Soviet republics which is led by it.

"The Church recognizes spiritual principles of existence; Communism rejects them. The Church believes in the living God, the Creator of the world, the Leader of Her life and destinies; Communism denies His existence, believing in the spontaneity of the world's existence and in the absence of rational, ultimate causes of its history. The Church assumes that the purpose of human life is in the heavenly fatherland, even if She lives in conditions of the highest development of material culture and general well-being; Communism refuses to recognize any other purpose of mankind's existence than terrestrial welfare. The ideological differences between the Church and the State descend from the apex of philosophical observations to the region of immediately practical significance, the sphere of ethics, justice and law, which Communism considers the conditional result of class struggle, assessing phenomena in the moral sphere exclusively in terms of utility. The Church preaches love and mercy; Communism - camaraderie and merciless struggle. The Church instils in believers humility, which elevates the person; Communism debases man by pride. The Church preserves chastity of the body and the sacredness of reproduction; Communism sees nothing else in marital relations than the satisfaction of the instincts. The Church sees in religion

a life-bearing force which does not only guarantee for men his eternal, foreordained destiny, but also serves as the source of all the greatness of man's creativity, as the basis of his earthly happiness, sanity and welfare; Communism sees religion as opium, inebriating the people and relaxing their energies, as the source of their suffering and poverty. The Church wants to see religion flourish; Communism wants its death. Such a deep contradiction in the very basis of their Weltanschauungen precludes any intrinsic approximation or reconciliation between the Church and the State, as there cannot be any between affirmation and negation, between yes and no, because the very soul of the Church, the condition of Her existence and the sense of Her being, is that which is categorically denied by Communism.

"The Church cannot attain such an approximation by any compromises or concessions, by any partial changes in Her teaching or reinterpretation of it in the spirit of Communism. Pitiful attempts of this kind were made by the renovationists: one of them declared it his task to instill into the consciousness of believers the idea that Communism is in its essence indistinguishable from Christianity, and that the Communist State strives for the attainment of the same aims as the Gospel, but by its own means, that is, not by the power of religious conviction, but by the path of compulsion. Others recommended a review of Christian dogmatics in such a way that its teaching about the relationship of God to the world would not remind one of the relationship of a monarch to his subjects and would rather correspond to republican conceptions. Yet others demanded the exclusion from the calendar of saints 'of bourgeois origin' and their removal from church veneration. These attempts, which were obviously insincere, produced a profound feeling of indignation among believing people.

"The Orthodox Church will never stand upon this unworthy path and will never, either in whole or in part, renounce her teaching of the Faith that has been winnowed through the holiness of past centuries, for one of the eternally shifting moods of society..."

On June 10, Metropolitan Sergius issued an address to the archpastors, pastors and flock of the Russian Church in the same spirit, noting that there were certain irreconcilable differences between the Church and the State. At the same time, however, he argued for the necessity of the Church being legalized by the State: "The lack of free registration for our church government bodies is creating for the hierarchy many practical inconveniences, imparting to its activities a kind of secret and even conspiratorial character, which, in turn, generates all sorts of misunderstandings and suspicion. And he went on: "On receiving the right to a legal existence, we clearly take account of the fact that, together with rights, obligations are also laid upon us in relation to those authorities that

give us these rights. And I have now taken upon myself, in the name of the whole of our Orthodox Old-Church hierarchy and flock, to witness before Soviet power to our sincere readiness to be completely law-abiding citizens of the Soviet Union, loyal to its government and decisively setting ourselves apart from all political parties and undertakings directed to the harm of the Union. But let us be sincere to the end. We cannot pass over in silence the contradictions which exist between us Orthodox people and the Bolshevik-Communists who govern our Union. They see their task to be the struggle against God and His authority in the hearts of the people, while we see the significance and aim of our entire existence in the confession of faith in God as well as in the widest dissemination and affirmation of that faith in the hearts of the people. They accept only the materialistic conception of history, while we believe in Divine Providence, in miracles, etc. Far from promising reconciliation of that which is irreconcilable and from pretending to adapt our Faith to Communism, we will remain from the religious point of view what we are, that is, Old Churchmen or, as they call us, Tikhonites...”

With regard to the émigré bishops, who were, as we have seen, among the most anti-Soviet of the Russian bishops, Metropolitan Sergius kept to the same position as his predecessors, rejecting the possibility of taking any sanctions against them: “We cannot assume punitive functions and apply ecclesiastical punishments for vengeance... To inflict ecclesiastical punishment upon the émigré clergy for their disloyalty to the Soviet Union would be wholly inappropriate and would give unnecessary occasion for people to speak of the Soviet regime compelling us to do so.” A little later some ROCOR bishops asked Metropolitan Sergius to mediate in the dispute between their Synod and Metropolitan Eulogius of Paris, who refused to recognize the Synod’s authority. In his reply of September 12, 1926, Sergius refused “to be a judge in a case of which I know absolutely nothing... And in general, can the Moscow Patriarchate be the leader of the life of Orthodox émigrés?” No, he replied. And he called on the émigré bishops to create a single “central organ of Church administration which would be sufficiently authoritative to resolve all misunderstandings and differences, and which would have the power to cut off all disobedience, without recourse to our support. For grounds will always be found to suspect the authenticity of our instructions.” And again in its letter of April, 1927, Sergius’ Synod said that to govern the Orthodox dioceses which have arisen abroad “from Moscow is in the ecclesiastical sense impossible due to the lack of legal forms of relations with them”, demonstrating in detail that the Moscow Ecclesiastical Authorities were unable to judge the hierarchs abroad because the canons did not permit an ecclesiastical trial for political crimes, and also because it was impossible formally to organize a correct canonical court.”

This letter is important as it constitutes a de facto recognition of

ROCOR by the Moscow Patriarchate. That recognition was withdrawn only when ROCOR refused to accept Sergius' demand, in 1927, that her hierarchs swear loyalty to the Soviet Union...

Now the increasing divisions in the Church required the convening of a Church Council and the election of a lawful patriarch. This was the only possible way to solve the problem according to Orthodox tradition. But the Council had to take place in secret because of the authorities' obstructionist tactics.

"Such a secret Council," writes Sergius Shumilo, "took place de facto in 1926 by means of the collection of the signatures... The initiators of this secret election of a patriarch were Bishops Paulinus (Kroshechkin), Cornelius (Sobolev) and Athanasius (Sakharov), who relied on the support of the exiled Solovki bishops. Metropolitan Sergius (Stragorodsky) at first refused to support this initiative of the episcopate. However, the signatures of 25 bishops in support of the carrying out of the election of a patriarch were collected. Besides, this undertaking received the written support of the bishops in exile on Solovki. In such a situation Metropolitan Sergius was forced to submit to the opinion of the majority, although he declined from active support of this conciliar undertaking. As Archbishop Cornelius (Sobolev) witnessed concerning this: 'In my opinion, he [Metropolitan Sergius] was as it were not especially inclined to carry out the matter of the election of Cyril, but the situation and the canons obliged him to do this'.

"In the absence of lawful ecclesiastical power the growing disagreements between Metropolitan Agathangelus, Metropolitan Sergius, Archbishop Gregory and others, the carrying out of a secret Council and election at it of a canonical head of the Russian Church seemed the only exist from the dead-end that had emerged. Bishop Paulinus (Kroshechkin) clarified his actions as follows: 'In view of the worrying situation of the Church it was desirable to begin the matter of the election of a patriarch'... By November, 1926 72 signatures had collected in support of the election of Metropolitan Cyril of Kazan as the all-Russian patriarch.

"However, the conciliar will of the episcopate of the Russian Church was simply not realized in life because of the opposition of Soviet power. During the final phase of the elective process two participants in the secret collection of signatures [messengers of Bishop Paulinus] were unexpectedly arrested. The OGPU now had in its hand almost all the documents of this enterprise that had not been sanctioned by the authorities, including election ballots with the signatures of bishops. The majority of the participants in the secret conciliar election were arrested and cast into prisons or camps. Metropolitan Cyril was also not allowed to execute his duties. On December 21, 1926 he was arrested by the organs

of the OGPU and cast into prison for a new term (his term of exile had expired in the autumn of 1926). Metropolitan Sergius (Stragorodsky) was also arrested in connection with this affair. However, by contrast with the other hierarchs, he was very quickly released. As it turned out, the OGPU had been informed from the beginning about the secret elections of a patriarch and used this process for fresh repressions against the episcopate. There is an opinion that it was a planned provocation in which Metropolitan Sergius took part. But no confirmation of this version has yet been found...”

On December 8 Metropolitan Joseph of Petrograd took over as Peter’s deputy, in accordance with the latter’s will of one year before. But Joseph was prevented from leaving Yaroslavl by the authorities, so he handed the leadership of the Church to his deputies: Archbishop Cornelius (Sobolev), Archbishop Thaddeus (Uspensky) and Archbishop Seraphim (Samoilovich) of Uglich. On December 29, Metropolitan Joseph was arrested, and on the same day Archbishop Seraphim wrote that he was taking upon himself the duties of the deputy of the patriarchal locum tenens.

In the same month of December, 1926, Tuchkov proposed to Metropolitan Peter, who was in prison in Suzdal, that he renounce his locum tenancy. Peter refused, and then sent a message to everyone through a fellow prisoner that he would “never under any circumstances leave his post and would remain faithful to the Orthodox Church to death itself”.

This was a blow to the Soviets: while continuing to try and persuade Metropolitan Peter – through the well-known methods of torture – to change his mind, they would have to try and find another man to act as the Judas of the Russian Church. Fortunately for them, however, on January 1, 1927, while he was in Perm on his way to exile on the island of Khe in Siberia, Metropolitan Peter confirmed Sergius as his deputy. This suited the Soviets perfectly, because Sergius was well-known even from the pre-revolutionary period for his “leftist” views, and had even been a leader of the pro-Soviet renovationist schism in 1922.

Though he came to regret this decision, Metropolitan Peter was not able to revoke it officially from his remote exile. And the Soviets wasted no time in imprisoning Sergius, so as to remind him, if he needed reminding, who the real powers in the land were... After three months in prison, Sergius emerged in April a devoted servant of the revolution...

While Sergius was in prison, Archbishop Seraphim of Uglich had been managing affairs as *his* deputy. At the beginning of March he was summoned from Uglich to Moscow and interrogated for three days by the GPU. Evidently, they were thinking that if Seraphim might also be useful

to them, they might not need Sergius...

But they were mistaken. Seraphim was offered a Synod, and indicated who should be its members. Seraphim rejected this list, and put forward his own list of names, which included Metropolitan Cyril of Kazan, probably the most authoritative hierarch in Russia and one of Patriarch Tikhon's three locum tenentes (the others were Metropolitan Agathangel of Yaroslavl and Metropolitan Peter of Krutitsa).

"But he's in prison," they said.

"Then free him," said the archbishop.

The GPU then presented him with conditions for the legalization of the Church by Soviet power. This would have involved surrendering the Church into the power of the atheists.

Arfed Gustavson writes: "He refused outrightly without entering into discussions, pointing out that he was not entitled to decide such questions without the advice of his imprisoned superiors. When he was asked whom he would appoint as his executive deputy he is said to have answered that he would turn over the Church to the Lord Himself. The examining magistrate was said to have looked at him full of wonder and to have replied:

"'All the others have appointed deputies...'

"To this Seraphim countered: 'But I lay the Church in the hands of God, our Lord. I am doing this, so that the whole world may know what freedom Orthodox Christianity is enjoying in our free State.'"

Another account of this dialogue was given by Archbishop Seraphim's senior subdeacon, Michael Nikolaevich Yaroslavsky: "For 100 days Vladyka Seraphim happened to rule the whole of the Russian Orthodox Church. This was in 1926. Metropolitan Sergius was in prison, everybody was in prison...

"And so, as he had been put in charge, Vladyka told me that at that time the authorities offered him, as the Primate of the Church, a Synod of bishops. He did not agree and immediately received three years in Solovki camp. He did not betray the Church, but... declared the autocephaly of each diocese, since each Church Primate was another candidate for prison..."

This was a decisive moment, for the central hierarch of the Church was effectively declaring the Church's decentralization. And not before time.

For with the imprisonment of the last of the three possible locum tenentes there was really no canonical basis for establishing a central administration for the Church before the convocation of a Local Council. But this was prevented by the communists. As we have seen, the system of deputies of the deputy of the locum tenens had no basis in Canon Law or precedent in the history of the Church. And if it was really the case that the Church could not exist without a first hierarch and central administration, then the awful possibility existed that with the fall of the first hierarch the whole Church would fall, too...

The communists also wanted a centralized administration; so Tuchkov now turned to Metropolitan Agathangelus with the proposal that he lead the Church. He refused. Then he turned to Metropolitan Cyril with the same proposal. He, too, refused. The conversation between Tuchkov and Metropolitan Cyril is reported to have gone something like this:-

“If we have to remove some hierarch, will you help us in this?”

“Yes, if the hierarch appears to be guilty of some ecclesiastical transgression... In the contrary case, I shall tell him directly, ‘The authorities are demanding this of me, but I have nothing against you.’”

“No!” replied Tuchkov. “You must try to find an appropriate reason and remove him as if on your own initiative.”

To this the hierarch replied: “Eugene Nikolayevich! You are not the cannon, and I am not the shot, with which you want to blow up our Church from within!”

4. METROPOLITAN SERGIUS FORMS A SYNOD

On April 2, 1927 Metropolitan Sergius emerged from prison, ready to be the shot that would blow up the Orthodox Church from within... He was released from prison on condition that he did not leave Moscow – although before his arrest he had not had the right to live in Moscow. However, the investigation of his case was not discontinued, showing that the authorities still wanted to keep him on a leash... Five days later, Archbishop Seraphim handed over to him the government of the Russian Church. And another six days later, on April 13, Metropolitan Sergius announced to Bishop Alexis (Gotovtsev), who was temporary administrator of the Moscow diocese, that he had assumed the post of deputy of the patriarchal locum tenens.

On May 16 Sergius asked the NKVD for permission to hold a preliminary meeting with six or seven hierarchs with a view to inviting them to become members of a Synod and then to petition the government for registration of the Synod. The NKVD immediately agreed, acknowledging receipt of one rouble for the certificate. “Thus a one-rouble certificate inaugurated the history of the legalized Moscow Patriarchate.”

On May 18 the meeting took place, and the hierarchs agreed to convert their meeting into a temporary Patriarchal Holy Synod. The members of this Synod, according to Archbishop Seraphim’s subdeacon, were precisely those hierarchs that had been suggested to Archbishop Seraphim, but whom he had rejected... As the Catholic writer Deinber points out, “when the names of the bishops invited to join the Synod were made known, then there could be no further doubts concerning the capitulation of Metropolitan Sergius before Soviet power. The following joined the Synod: Archbishop Sylvester (Bratanovsky) – a former renovationist; Archbishop Alexis Simansky – a former renovationist, appointed to the Petrograd see by the Living Church after the execution of Metropolitan Benjamin [Kazansky]; Archbishop Philip [Gumilevsky] – a former beglopopovets, i.e. one who had left the Orthodox Church for the sect of the beglopopovtsi; Metropolitan Seraphim [Alexandrov] of Tver, a man whose connections with the OGPU were known to all Russia and whom no-one trusted...”

On May 20, the OGPU officially recognized this Synod, which suggested that Metropolitan Sergius had agreed to the terms of the legalization of the Church by Soviet power which Patriarch Tikhon and Metropolitan Peter had rejected. One of Sergius’ closest supporters, Bishop Metrophanes of Aksaisk, had once declared that “the legalization of the church administration is a sign of heterodoxy”... In any case, on May 25 Metropolitan Sergius and his “Patriarchal Holy Synod” now wrote to the

bishops enclosing the OGPU document and telling them that their diocesan councils should now seek registration from the local organs of Soviet power. Some hierarchs hastened to have their diocesan administrations legalized. But as it turned out, the OGPU was in no hurry to register diocesan councils before their membership had been established to the OGPU's satisfaction...

"In 1929, when the results were already obvious, [the Catacomb] Bishop Damascene (Tsedrik) wrote this in his 'Letter to the Legalized Ones': 'Fathers and brothers! While it is still not too late, do think and look into the essence of the 'legalization' that was graciously granted to you, lest you should later bitterly repent of the mistake that all of you with Metropolitan Sergius at your head are now committing! What you are accepting under the name of 'legalization' is, in essence, an act of bondage that guarantees you no rights whatsoever, while imposing upon you some grievous obligations. It would be naïve to expect anything other than that. The Communist Soviet Power is frank and consistent. It openly declared itself hostile to religion and set the destruction of the Church as its goal. It never stops stating openly and clearly its theomachistic tasks through its top governmental representatives and all of its junior agents. This is why it is very naïve and criminal to believe that the so-called legalization by the Soviets is even partially seeking the good of the Church."

In June, 1927 Sergius wrote to Metropolitan Eulogius of Paris directing him to sign a declaration of loyalty to the Soviet power. He agreed... On July 14, in ukaz № 93, Sergius demanded that all clergy abroad should sign a formal pledge to cease criticizing the Soviet government. It also stated that any clergyman abroad who refused to sign such would no longer be considered to be a part of the Moscow Patriarchate. This ukaz, which completely contradicted his previous ukaz of September 12, 1926, which blessed the hierarchs abroad to form their own independent administration, even included the actual text of the pledge that was to be signed: "I, the undersigned, promise that because of my actual dependence upon the Moscow Patriarchate, I will not permit myself neither in my social activities nor especially in my Church work, any expression that could in the least way be considered as being disloyal with regard to the Soviet government." The clergy abroad were given until October 15 to sign this pledge. The Council of Bishops, in its encyclical dated August 26, 1927, refused this demand and declared: "The free portion of the Church of Russia must terminate relations with the ecclesiastical administration in Moscow [i.e., with Sergius and his synod], in view of the fact that normal relations with it are impossible and because of its enslavement by the atheist regime, which is depriving it of freedom to act according to its own will and of freedom to govern the Church in accordance with the canons."

However, Metropolitan Eulogius of Paris, agreed to sign, “but on condition that the term ‘loyalty’ means for us the apoliticisation of the émigré Church, that is, we are obliged not to make the ambon a political arena, if this will relieve the difficult situation of our native Mother Church; but we cannot be ‘loyal’ to Soviet power: we are not citizens of the USSR, and the USSR does not recognise us as such, and therefore the political demand is from the canonical point of view non-obligatory for us...”

The impossible demands that Sergius’ appeal for loyalty to the Soviet Union placed on hierarchs living outside the Soviet Union was pointed out by the future hieromartyr, Archbishop John of Latvia, to Metropolitan Eleutherius of Lithuania: “As far as I know you, your co-pastors and flock, the question of loyalty to the USSR and the openly antitheist authorities in power there can be resolved sincerely by you only in a negative sense. But if you and your flock were not such as I know you to be, the confession of loyalty to the USSR and the authorities in power there would still be impossible for you from a juridical point of view. And you and your co-pastors and flock are obliged under oath to be faithful citizens of the Lithuanian Republic. Simultaneous fidelity both to Lithuania and the USSR is juridically unthinkable. But even if it were not a question of loyalty in the sense of fidelity to the USSR where the ‘appeal’ [of Metropolitan Sergius] was born, but in the sense of benevolence towards the USSR, then all the same you, as a faithful son of Lithuania, cannot in the future and in all cases promise benevolence towards the USSR...”

On July 5, 1928, the Hierarchical Synod of ROCOR decreed: “The present ukaz [of Sergius] introduces nothing new into the position of the Church Abroad. It repeats the same notorious ukaz of his Holiness Patriarch Tikhon in 1922, which was decisively rejected by the whole Church Abroad in its time.” In response to this refusal, Metropolitan Sergius expelled the hierarchs of the Russian Church Abroad from membership of the Moscow Patriarchate. So the first schism between the Russian Church inside and outside Russia took place as a result of the purely political demands of Sergius’ Moscow Patriarchate.

5. THE DECLARATION OF METROPOLITAN SERGIUS

On July 16/29, Metropolitan Sergius issued the infamous Declaration that has been the basis of the existence of the Sovietized Moscow Patriarchate ever since, and which was to cause the greatest and most destructive schism in the history of the Orthodox Church since the fall of the Papacy in the eleventh century.

Several points should be noted about this document. First Sergius pretended that Patriarch Tikhon had always been aiming to have the Church legalized by the State, but had been frustrated by the émigré hierarchs and by his own death. There is a limited truth in this – but it was not the émigré hierarchs that frustrated the patriarch, nor did he want the kind of legalization Sergius wanted... Then he went on: “At my proposal and with permission from the State, a blessed Patriarchal Synod has been formed by those whose signatures are affixed to this document at its conclusion. Missing are the Metropolitan of Novgorod, Arsenius, who has not arrived yet, and Archbishop Sebastian of Kostroma, who is ill. Our application that this Synod be permitted to take up the administration of the Orthodox All-Russian Church has been granted. Now our Orthodox Church has not only a canonically legal central administration but a central administration that is legal also according to the law of the State of the Soviet Union. We hope that this legalization will be gradually extended to the lower administrative units, to the dioceses and the districts. It is hardly necessary to explain the significance and the consequences of this change for our Orthodox Church, her clergy and her ecclesiastical activity. Let us therefore thank the Lord, Who has thus favoured our Church. Let us also give thanks before the whole people to the Soviet Government for its understanding of the religious needs of the Orthodox population. At the same time let us assure the Government that we will not misuse the confidence it has shown us.

“In undertaking now, with the blessings of the Lord, the work of this Synod, we clearly realize the greatness of our task and that of all the representatives of the Church. We must show not only with words but with deeds, that not only people indifferent to the Orthodox Faith or traitors to the Orthodox Church can be loyal citizens of the Soviet Union and loyal subjects of the Soviet power, but also the most zealous supporters of the Orthodox Church, to whom the Church with all her dogmas and traditions, with all her laws and prescriptions, is as dear as Truth and Life.

“We want to be Orthodox, and at the same time to see the Soviet Union as our civil Fatherland, whose triumphs and successes are also our triumphs and successes, whose failures are our failures. Every attack, boycott, public catastrophe or an ordinary case of assassination, as the

recent one in Warsaw, will be regarded as an attack against ourselves...”

Protopriest Lev Lebedev comments on this: “This murder in Warsaw was the murder by B. Koverdaya of the Bolshevik Voikoff (also known as Weiner), who was one of the principal organizers of the murder of the Imperial Family, which fact was well known then, in 1927. So Sergius let the Bolsheviks clearly understand that he and his entourage were at one with them in all their evil deeds up to and including regicide.”

Metropolitan Sergius continued: “Even if we remain Orthodox, we shall yet do our duties as citizens of the Soviet Union ‘not only for wrath but also for conscience’s sake’ (Romans 13.5), and we hope that with the help of God and through working together and giving support to one another we shall be able to fulfil this task.

“We can be hindered only by that which hindered the construction of Church life on the bases of loyalty in the first years of Soviet power. This is an inadequate consciousness of the whole seriousness of what has happened in our country. The establishment of Soviet power has seemed to many like some kind of misunderstanding, something coincidental and therefore not long lasting. People have forgotten that there are no coincidences for the Christian and that in what has happened with us, as in all places and at all times, the same right hand of God is acting, that hand which inexorably leads every nation to the end predetermined for it. To such people who do not want to understand ‘the signs of the times’, it may also seem that it is wrong to break with the former regime and even with the monarchy, without breaking with Orthodoxy... Only ivory-tower dreamers can think that such an enormous society as our Orthodox Church, with the whole of its organization, can have a peaceful existence in the State while hiding itself from the authorities. Now, when our Patriarchate, fulfilling the will of the reposed Patriarch, has decisively and without turning back stepped on the path of loyalty, the people who think like this have to either break themselves and, leaving their political sympathies at home, offer to the Church only their faith and work with us only in the name of faith, or (if they cannot immediately break themselves) at least not hinder us, and temporarily leave the scene. We are sure that they will again, and very soon, return to work with us, being convinced that only the relationship to the authorities has changed, while faith and Orthodox Christian life remain unshaken...”

An article in *Izvestia* immediately noted the essence of the declaration – a return to renovationism: “The far-sighted part of the clergy set out on this path already in 1922”. So “sergianism”, as Sergius’ position came to be known, was “neo-renovationism”, and therefore subject to the same condemnation as the earlier renovationism of “the Living Church” received – ***anathema***. As recently as November, 2008 the True Orthodox

Church of Russia has defined sergianism as “a neo-renovationist schism”.

The radical error of this declaration lay in the idea that, in a state whose aim was the extirpation of all religion, it was possible to preserve loyalty to the State while “faith and Orthodox Christian life remained unshaken”. This presupposed that it was possible in the Soviet Union to draw a clear line between politics and religion. But in practice, even more than in theory, this line proved impossible to draw. For the Bolsheviks, there was no such dividing line; for them, *everything* was ideological, everything had to be in accordance with their ideology, there could be no room for disagreement, no private spheres into which the state and its ideology did not pry. Unlike the Roman emperors, who allowed the Christians to order their own lives in their own way so long as they showed loyalty to the state, the Bolsheviks insisted in imposing their own ways upon the Christians in every sphere: in family life (civil marriage only, divorce on demand, children spying on parents), in education (compulsory Marxism), in economics (dekulakization, collectivization), in military service (the oath of allegiance to Lenin), in science (Darwinism, Lysenkoism), in art (socialist realism), and in religion (the requisitioning of valuables, registration, commemoration of the authorities at the Liturgy, reporting of confessions by the priests). Resistance to any one of these demands was counted as “anti-Soviet behaviour”, i.e. *political* disloyalty. Therefore it was no use protesting one's political loyalty to the regime if one refused to accept just one of these demands. According to the Soviet interpretation of the word: “Whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one has become guilty of all of it” (James 2.10), such a person was an *enemy of the people*. Metropolitan Sergius’ identification of his and his Church’s joys and sorrows with the joys and sorrows of Soviet communism placed the souls of the millions who followed him in the most serious jeopardy.

The publication of Sergius’ Declaration was greeted with a storm of criticism. Its opponents saw in it a more subtle version of renovationism. Even its supporters and neutral commentators from the West recognized that it marked a radical change in the relationship of the Church to the State. thus Professor William Fletcher comments: “This was a profound and important change in the position of the Russian Orthodox Church, one which evoked a storm of protest.” According to the Soviet scholar Titov, “after the Patriarchal church changed its relationship to the Soviet State, undertaking a position of loyalty, in the eyes of the believers any substantial difference whatsoever between the Orthodox Church and the renovationists disappeared.” According to Snychev, quoting from a renovationist source, in some dioceses in the Urals up to 90% of parishes sent back Sergius’ declaration as a sign of protest.” Again, Donald Rayfield wrote that Sergius “formally surrendered the Orthodox Church to the Bolshevik party and state.”

On September 14/27, the bishops imprisoned on Solovki issued a statement, denouncing Sergius' Declaration: "The subjection of the Church to the State's decrees is expressed [in Sergius' declaration] in such a categorical and sweeping form that it could easily be understood in the sense of a complete entanglement of Church and State... The Church cannot declare all the triumphs and successes of the State to be Her own triumphs and successes. Every government can occasionally make unwarranted, unjust and cruel decisions which become obligatory to the Church by way of coercion, but which the Church cannot rejoice in or approve of. One of the tasks of the present government is the elimination of all religion. The government's successes in this direction cannot be recognized by the Church as Her own successes... The epistle renders to the government 'thanks before the whole people to the Soviet government for its understanding of the religious needs of the Orthodox population'. An expression of gratitude of such a kind on the lips of the head of the Russian Orthodox Church cannot be sincere and therefore does not correspond to the dignity of the Church... The epistle of the patriarchate sweepingly accepts the official version and lays all the blame for the grievous clashes between the Church and the State on the Church...

"In 1926 Metropolitan Sergius said that he saw himself only as a temporary deputy of the patriarchal locum tenens and in this capacity as not empowered to address pastoral messages to the entire Russian Church. If then he thought himself empowered only to issue circular letters, why has he changed his mind now? The pastoral message of Metropolitan Sergius and his Synod leads the Church into a pact with the State. It was considered as such by its authors as well as by the government. Sergius' action resembles the political activities of the 'Living Church' and differs from them not in nature but only in form and scope..."

The Solovki bishops affirmed the civic loyalty of the Orthodox Church to the Soviet State. But, as M.B. Danilushkin points out, "the tone of these affirmations was fundamentally different than in the Declaration of Metropolitan Sergius. Recognizing necessity - mainly the inevitability of civil submission to the authorities - they decisively protested against the unceremonious interference of the authorities into the inner affairs of the Church, the ban on missionary activity and the religious education of children, firmly expressing their position that in this sphere there could be no compromise on the part of the Church. Although the Declaration of Metropolitan Sergius recognized the religious persecutions in the USSR, it called, not the state, but the believers, to peace. In this consists the fundamental difference between the two documents..."

According to different sources, 17 or 20 or 26 bishops signed this epistle. However, the majority of the bishops on Solovki did not consider

Sergius' declaration a reason for breaking communion with him. Metropolitan Cyril of Kazan wrote to an unknown person that the Solovki bishops wanted to wait for the repentance of Sergius "until the convening of a canonical Council... in the assurance that the Council could not fail to demand that of him".

6. THE BIRTH OF THE CATACOMB CHURCH

Although the church revolution engineered by Metropolitan Sergius and supported by the Soviets was conceived and first brought to fruition in the centre, in Moscow, it could not hope to succeed on a large scale if it did not also triumph in the other capital of Russian life, Petrograd – or Leningrad, as the communists now called it. The revolutionaries must have had good hopes of succeeding also in Petrograd. After all, it had been the birthplace of the political revolution in 1917, and had also been pivotal in the renovationists' church revolution in 1922-23. But by the Providence of God it was precisely in revolutionary Petrograd that the fight-back began. Let us go back a little in time to see how this came to pass.

By the end of 1925 the Episcopal council of vicar-bishops that had ruled the Petrograd diocese since the martyric death of Metropolitan Benjamin in 1922 ceased its existence when three bishops were arrested: Benedict (Plotnikov), Innocent (Tikhonov) and Seraphim (Protopopov). There remained only Bishop Gregory (Lebedev). Also in the city were Bishop Sergius (Druzhinin) and Bishop Demetrius (Lyubimov). These three were all thoroughly Orthodox bishops, who would lead the Catacomb Church after 1927 and suffer martyric deaths. However, in the spring of 1926 there returned from exile two Petrograd vicar-bishops, Nicholas (Yarushevich) and Alexis (Simansky). Alexis "hurried to Moscow to Metropolitan Sergius, and found with him, who was also a former renovationist, complete mutual understanding. From Moscow Alexis returned [to Petrograd] with a resolution on the freeing of Bishop Gregory (Lebedev) of Schlisselburg from administration of the Leningrad diocese and on the appointment of Alexis himself as temporary administrator. He began to serve in the cathedral church of the Resurrection-on-the-Blood. However, the people distrusted him, while the majority of clergy began to oppose him, according to the witness of Protopriest Michael Cheltsov, who was the first who definitely and categorically expressed himself against Alexis, 'not having the strength or right to recognize him for his very great sin against the Church and Metropolitan Benjamin and for his huge service to renovationism'."

Bishops Alexis and Nicholas, together with a group of clergy led by Protopriest Nicholas Chukov, who became Metropolitan Gregory of Leningrad after the war, now represented the neo-renovationist tendency in the city who wanted to improve relations with the Soviets and get the Church legalized by them.

Fr. Michael Cheltsov describes the incipient schism between these two groups of bishops: "Alexis, led by the group of Fr. Chukov and co., decided

to push through the matter of negotiations with Soviet power over legalization through the common participation of all the bishops and even through a decision by the bishops alone. Gregory gave no reply to his invitation and did not go. Demetrius at first suggested going, and Gregory advised him to go. Sergius of Narva, flattered by this for him unexpected beckoning into the midst of the bishops, was staying with me and Bishop Demetrius and on our joint advice was at the meeting. The three bishops did not constitute an assembly. Alexis and Nicholas, who were both sympathetic to legalization and wanted it fervently, could not consider Sergius as their equal, and therefore without the other two considered that the meeting had not taken place. Sergius also spoke about the necessity of a meeting of all the bishops, but introduced the desire to bring to this meeting some of the city protopriests. The meeting ended with nothing. But for the two bishops – Alexis and Demetrius – it was clear that Gregory and Demetrius were not with them, but against them.”

“Two groups became clearly delineated: Alexis and Nicholas, and Gregory and Demetrius. Sergius, in view of his closeness to [Protopriest Basil] Veriuzhsky [rector of the zealot Cathedral of the Resurrection “on the Blood”] and to me, also joined the group of Gregory...”

In August, 1926 Bishop Alexis was transferred to the see of Novgorod, and Archbishop Joseph (Petrovykh) of Petrograd was appointed Metropolitan of Petrograd. This appointment was greeted with great joy by the faithful. However, the Soviets refused Joseph permission to stay in Petrograd - he served there only once, on September 12, the feast of St. Alexander Nevsky, and never returned to the city again. In the meantime, he appointed the little-known Bishop Gabriel (Voyevodin) as his deputy.

Meanwhile, Bishop Alexis received permission from the Soviets to stay in Petrograd and began to serve in the churches of his friends in the city. This was opposed by Bishops Gregory and Demetrius, who obtained from Metropolitan Joseph that bishops from other sees (i.e. Alexis) should not be allowed to serve in the city without the permission of Bishop Gabriel. But “Alexis, raised by Metropolitan Sergius to the rank of archbishop, paid no attention to this decree and continued to serve in the churches of the city, without abandoning his intrigues against the persecuted hierarch [Metropolitan Joseph]. The clergy were upset, and there were rumours that Vladyka Joseph would not be coming back and that bishop Alexis would soon be appointed the ruling bishop in the rank of metropolitan.”

At the beginning of the Great Fast, 1927 Bishops Gregory and Gabriel were arrested and cast into prison. Since Metropolitan Joseph was still in exile in Ustiuzhna, Bishop Nicholas began to administer the diocese as being the senior bishop by ordination, and in April received official permission to do this from Metropolitan Sergius in Moscow. On his return

to Petrograd, Bishop Nicholas began to act authoritatively and brusquely towards his fellow hierarchs, and in August he obtained the forcible retirement of Bishop Sergius from his see.

The previous month Metropolitan Sergius' Declaration had been published, and Bishop Nicholas tried to get it distributed and read out in church. However, there was widespread resistance to this. When Fr. Nicholas Chukov read it out, there was a great commotion in the church. And when one of the deans, the future Hieromartyr Fr. Sergius Tikhomirov, received it, he immediately sent it back to Nicholas and resigned his deanery. "Whether the epistle was read out somewhere or not," writes Fr. Michael Cheltsov, "the mood among the Peterites against Metropolitan Sergius and to a significant extent against our Nicholas was sharply negative. Their Orthodoxy, especially of the former, was subjected to powerful doubt, and trust in them was undermined. Our clergy, if they read the epistle, were all against it."

However, it was not the Declaration so much as the actions undertaken by Metropolitan Sergius against Metropolitan Joseph that stirred the Petrograd flock into action. On September 17, 1927, Metropolitan Sergius and his Synod, probably acting under pressure from the authorities, transferred Metropolitan Joseph from Petrograd to Odessa. On September 28, Metropolitan Joseph wrote to Sergius that he refused to accept it, saying that he saw in it "an evil intrigue by a clique which did not want him to be in Leningrad". Then he wrote to Tuchkov asking that he be allowed to administer the Leningrad diocese. Finally he wrote to Sergius again rebuking him and his Synod for "a woefully servile obedience to a principle alien to the Church". He said that he regarded his transfer to the Odessa see as "anti-canonical, ill-advised and pleasing to an evil intrigue in which I will have no part". Or, as he put it in 1930: "Summoned for this reason to Moscow, and learning that the transfer was elicited by intrigues on the part of individual members of the clergy, I declared that I found the ban for these reasons to be unlawful".

On October 21, Sergius directed all the clergy in Russia to commemorate the Soviet authorities, and not the bishops who were in exile. This measure greatly increased the anxiety of the faithful. The commemoration of the Soviet authorities was seen by many as the boundary beyond which the Church would fall away from Orthodoxy. And the refusal to commemorate the exiled hierarchs implied that the hierarchs themselves were not Orthodox and constituted a break with the tradition of commemorating exiled hierarchs that extended back to the time of the Roman catacombs. Sergius was in effect cutting the faithful off from their canonical hierarchs.

One of the leaders of the opposition, the future martyr and possibly

bishop, Mark Novoselov, saw in these events the third step in the revolution's destruction of the Church. The first step was the revolution's depriving the Church of Her civil protector, the Orthodox Christian Emperor in 1917, "thereby doubling the significance of the pastors". The second step was its depriving the Church of the possibility of convening Councils, by which it "increased their [the pastors'] significance tenfold, since it made every bishop the real guardian of Orthodoxy in his province. The third step took place in 1927, when "under the form of the gift of legalization the Church was deprived of this Her head," which increased the significance of the true pastors still more.

Sergius' act of October 21 "depersonalized" the Liturgy, according to Mark, by "1) casting into the shade the person of Metropolitan Peter through (a) ceasing to commemorate him as 'our Lord' and (b) placing the name of Metropolitan Sergius next to it, that is, two names in one patriarchal place, which is both contrary to the spirit of the canons and deprives the name of the head of the Russian Church - and the personal name of Metropolitan Peter - of its very symbolical meaning; 2) introducing the commemoration of the impersonal name of the authorities, ... and 3) casting into oblivion the names and persons who shone out in their confessing exploit."

Hieromartyr Mark pointed out that, while transfers of bishops took place frequently in tsarist Russia, those were in the context of a single Church family, when Russia was as it were "one diocese". But the transfers in Soviet times were far more dangerous; for when the people were deprived of their confessing bishop, whom they knew and loved, there was no guarantee that his replacement - if there was a replacement - would be Orthodox.

On October 25, Bishop Nicholas (Yarushevich) proclaimed in the cathedral of the Resurrection of Christ in Petrograd the decision of the Provisional Synod to transfer Metropolitan Joseph (Petrovykh) from Petrograd to Odessa (the secular authorities had already forbidden Metropolitan Joseph to return to the city). In the same decision Bishops Demetrius and Seraphim were forbidden to leave the diocese "without the knowledge and blessing" of Bishop Nicholas (Yarushevich). This caused major disturbances in Petrograd. However, Metropolitan Sergius paid no attention to the disturbances in Petrograd. Taking upon himself the administration of the diocese, he sent in his place Bishop Alexis (Simansky). So already, only three months after the declaration, the new revolutionary cadres were being put in place... Then, on October 31, Archimandrite Sergius (Zenkevich) was consecrated Bishop of Detskoe Selo, although the canonical bishop, Gregory (Lebedev), was still alive but languishing in a GPU prison. From that moment many parishioners stopped going to churches where Metropolitan Sergius' name was

commemorated, and Bishop Nicholas was not invited to serve.

On October 30 Metropolitan Joseph wrote to Sergius: "You made me metropolitan of Leningrad without the slightest striving for it on my part. It was not without disturbance and distress that I accepted this dangerous obedience, which others, perhaps wisely (otherwise it would have been criminal) decisively declined... Vladyko! Your firmness is yet able to correct everything and urgently put an end to every disturbance and indeterminateness. It is true, I am not free and cannot now serve my flock, but after all everybody understands this 'secret'... Now anyone who is to any degree firm and needed is unfree (and will hardly be free in the future)... You say: this is what the authorities want; they are giving back their freedom to exiled hierarchs on the condition that they change their former place of serving and residence. But what sense or benefit can we derive from the leap-frogging and shuffling of hierarchs that this has elicited, when according to the spirit of the Church canons they are in an indissoluble union with their flock as with a bride? Would it not be better to say: let it be, this false human mercy, which is simply a mockery of our human dignity, which strives for a cheap effect, a spectre of clemency. Let it be as it was before; it will be better like that. Somehow we'll get to the time when they finally understand that the eternal, universal Truth cannot be conquered by exiles and vain torments... One compromise might be permissible in the given case... Let them (the hierarchs) settle in other places as temporarily governing them, but let them unfailingly retain their former title... I cannot be reconciled in my conscience with any other scheme, I am absolutely unable to recognize as correct my disgustingly tsarist-rasputinite transfer to the Odessa diocese, which took place without any fault on my part or any agreement of mine, and even without my knowledge. And I demand that my case be immediately transferred from the competence of your Synod, in whose competence I am not the only one to doubt, for discussion by a larger Council of bishops, to which alone I consider myself bound to display unquestioning obedience."

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On December 12, they sent a delegation led by Bishop Demetrius and representing eight Petrograd bishops, clergy and academics to Moscow to

meet Sergius. Here the conversation centred, not on Sergius' canonical transgressions, but on the central issue of his relationship to Soviet power. At one point Sergius said: "By my new church policy I am saving the Church." To which Archpriest Victorinus Dobronravov replied: "The Church does not have need of salvation; the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. You, yourself, Vladyka, have need of salvation through the Church."

On December 15 Tuchkov, having received a secret report from Leningrad on this meeting with Sergius, wrote the following in his own handwriting: "To Comrade Polyansky. 1. Tell Leningrad that Sergius had a delegation with such-and-such suggestions. 2. Suggest that the most active laymen be arrested under some other pretences. 3. Tell them that we will influence Sergius that he ban certain of the oppositional bishops from serving, and let Yarushevich then ban some of the priests."

After further delegations and dialogues in this vein, Bishops Demetrius of Gdov and Sergius of Narva separated from Sergius on December 26: "for the sake of the peace of our conscience we reject the person and the works of our former leader [predstoiatelia – Sergius was meant], who has unlawfully and beyond measure exceeded his rights". This was approved by Metropolitan Joseph (who had been prevented from coming to Petrograd) on January 7.

In a letter to a Soviet archimandrite, Metropolitan Joseph rejected the charge of being a schismatic and accused Sergius of being a schismatic. He went on: "The defenders of Sergius say that the canons allow one to separate oneself from a bishop only for heresy which has been condemned by a Council. Against this one may reply that the deeds of Metropolitan Sergius may be sufficiently placed in this category as well, if one has in mind such an open violation by him of the freedom and dignity of the Church, One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic. But beyond this, the canons themselves could not foresee many things, and can one dispute that it is even worse and more harmful than any heresy when one plunges a knife into the Church's very heart – Her freedom and dignity?... 'Lest imperceptibly and little by little we lose the freedom which our Lord Jesus Christ, the Liberator of all men, has given us as a free gift by His Own Blood' (8th Canon of the Third Ecumenical Council)... Perhaps I do not dispute that 'there are more of you at present than of us'. And let it be said that 'the great mass is not for me', as you say. But I will never consider myself a schismatic, even if I were to remain absolutely alone, as one of the holy confessors once was. The matter is not at all one of quantity, do not forget that for a minute: 'The Son of God when He cometh shall He find faith on the earth?' (Luke 18.8). And perhaps the last 'rebels' against the betrayers of the Church and the accomplices of Her ruin will be not only bishops and not protopriests, but the simplest mortals, just as at the Cross of Christ His last gasp of suffering was heard

by a few simple souls who were close to Him...”

Sergius began issuing bans against the True Orthodox bishops – which were ignored by the True Orthodox. On December 30 Archbishop Demetrius wrote to the Muscovite priest Fr. Alexander Sidorov, who had been threatened with defrocking: “May the Lord help you to remain in peace and unanimity in the firm confession of the purity and truth of the Orthodox faith, helping each other with love in everything. Do not be disturbed by any bans that the apostates from the faith of Christ are preparing for you. Any ban or defrocking of you by Metropolitan Sergius, his synod or bishops for your stand in the Truth has not reality for you. As long as there remains just one firmly Orthodox bishop, have communion with him. If the Lord permits it, and you remain without a bishop, then may the Spirit of truth, the Holy Spirit, be with you all, inspiring you to solve all the questions which you may encounter on your path in the spirit of True Orthodoxy.” Again, on January 4/17, 1928 he wrote “to Father Superiors”: “Metropolitan Sergius... has sinned not only against the canonical order of the Church, but also dogmatically against her person, blaspheming the holiness of the exploit of her confessors by suspecting that their Christian convictions were impure and supposedly mixed with politics, against her Catholicity – by their and the synod’s violent actions, against her Apostolicity – by subjecting the Church to secular orders and by the inner break with Metropolitan Peter (while preserving a false unity), who did not give Metropolitan Sergius the right to carry out his recent actions...””

Meanwhile, antisergianist groups were forming in different parts of the country. Thus between October 3 and 6 an antisergianist diocesan assembly took place in Ufa, and on November 8 Archbishop Andrew of Ufa issued an encyclical from Kzyl-Orda in which he said that “even if the lying Sergius repents, as he repented three times before of renovationism, under no circumstances must he be received into communion”. This encyclical quickly circulated throughout Eastern Russia and Siberia. Again, in November, Bishop Victor of Glazov broke with Sergius. He had especially noted the phrase in the declaration that “only ivory-tower dreamers can think that such an enormous society as our Orthodox Church, with the whole of its organisation, can have a peaceful existence in the State while hiding itself from the authorities.” To Sergius himself Bishop Victor wrote: “The enemy has lured and seduced you a second time with the idea of an organization of the Church. But if this organization is bought for the price of the Church of Christ Herself no longer remaining the house of Grace-giving salvation for men, and he who received the organization ceases to be what he was – for it is written, ‘Let his habitation be made desolate, and his bishopric let another take’ (Acts 1.20) – then it were better for us never to have any kind of organization. What is the benefit if we, having become by God’s Grace temples of the

Holy Spirit, become ourselves suddenly worthless, while at the same time receiving an organization for ourselves? No. Let the whole visible material world perish; let there be more important in our eyes the certain perdition of the soul to which he who presents such pretexts for sin will be subjected.” And he concluded that Sergius’ pact with the atheists was “not less than any heresy or schism, but is rather incomparably greater, for it plunges a man immediately into the abyss of destruction, according to the unlying word: ‘Whosoever shall deny Me before men...’ (Matthew 10.33).”

Bishop Victor wrote: “It is necessary that Moscow should begin to act, and not merely passively endure the mockeries on the Orthodox Church. Then other dioceses will be encouraged.” However, in Moscow only a few parishes refused to recognize Metropolitan Sergius, and the true centre of the Catacomb Church remained Petrograd. Thus it was to Archbishop Demetrius in Petrograd that prominent Muscovites like Fr. Valentine Sventitsky referred. The clergy of Serpukhov under Bishop Maximus also saw Demetrius as their leader.

At the same time antisergianism began to develop in the Ukraine with the publication of the “Kievan appeal” by Schema-Archbishop Anthony (Abashidze), Bishop Damascene of Glukhov and Fr. Anatolius Zhurakovsky. They wrote concerning Sergius’ declaration: “Insofar as the deputy of the patriarchal locum tenens makes declarations in the person of the whole Church and undertakes responsible decisions without the agreement of the locum tenens and an array of bishops, he is clearly going beyond the bounds of his prerogatives...” In December the Kievans were joined by two brother bishops – Archbishops Averky and Pachomius (Kedrov).

The True Orthodox bishops in the Ukraine separated into two groups: the Josephites, who completely rejected all communion with the sergianists, and a group led by Schema-Archbishop Anthony (Abashidze), which rejected Sergius’ declaration, but remained in communion with both the Josephites and the Sergianists insofar as they all commemorated Metropolitan Sergius at the liturgy.

Also in the Ukraine was the famous writer Sergius Alexandrovich Nilus, who wrote to L.A. Orlov in February, 1928: “As long as there is a church of God that is not of ‘the Church of the evildoers’, go to it whenever you can; but if not, pray at home... They will say: ‘But where will you receive communion? With whom? I reply: ‘The Lord will show you, or an Angel will give you communion, for in ‘the Church of the evildoers’ there is not and cannot be the Body and Blood of the Lord. Here in Chernigov, out of all the churches only the church of the Trinity has remained faithful to Orthodoxy; but if it, too, will commemorate the [sergianist] Exarch

Michael, and, consequently, will have communion in prayer with him, acting with the blessing of Sergius and his Synod, then we shall break communion with it.”

On February 6, 1928 the hierarchs of the Yaroslavl diocese, led by Metropolitan Agathangel, signed an act of separation from Metropolitan Sergius. Metropolitan Joseph also signed the document. Two days later he announced to his Petrograd vicars, pastors and flock that he was taking upon himself the leadership of the Petrograd diocese. This persuaded the authorities to arrest him on February 29, and send him again to the Nikolo-Modensky monastery.

On March 11 Metropolitan Sergius and his Synod placed Metropolitan Joseph under ban. However, this did not prevent him from continuing to direct his two bishops in Petrograd, Archbishop Demetrius and Bishop Sergius, who also acted as a unifying focus for many True Orthodox in other parts of the country. Thus was born the “Josephite” movement, the most important branch of the Catacomb Church in the inter-war years...

In the birth of the Catacomb Church in 1927-28 we can see the rebirth of the spirit of the 1917-18 Council. In the previous decade, first under Patriarch Tikhon and then under Metropolitan Peter, the original fierce tone of reproach and rejection of the God-hating authorities, epitomized above all by the anathematization of Soviet power, had gradually softened under the twin pressures of the Bolsheviks from without and the renovationists from within. Although the apocalyptic spirit of the Council remained alive in the masses, and prevented the Church leaders from actually commemorating the antichristian power, compromises continued to be made – compromises that were never repaid by compromises on the part of the Bolsheviks.

However, these acts did not cross the line separating compromise from apostasy. That line was passed by Metropolitan Sergius when he recognized *the God-cursed power to be God-established*, and ordered its commemoration while banning the commemoration of the confessing bishops. Already in the official church calendar for 1928 Sergius’ church was looking like a Sovietized institution through its inclusion among the feasts of the church of: the memory of the Leader of the Proletariat Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (on the 32nd Sunday after Pentecost), the Overthrow of the Autocracy (in the Third Week of the Great Fast), the memory of the Paris Commune (the same week), the Day of the Internationale and the Day of the Proletarian Revolution.

At this point the spirit of the 1918 Council flared up again in all its original strength. For, as a “Letter from Russia” put it many years later: “It’s no use our manoeuvring; there’s nothing for us to preserve except

the things that are God's. For the things that are Caesar's (if one should really consider it to be Caesar and not Pharaoh) are always associated with the quenching of the Spirit." Again, as Protopresbyter Michael Polsky wrote: "The Orthodoxy that submits to the Soviets and has become a weapon of the worldwide antichristian deception is not Orthodoxy, but the deceptive heresy of antichristianity clothed in the torn raiment of historical Orthodoxy..."

7. THE MARTYRDOM OF THE CATACOMB CHURCH

From the beginning Metropolitan Sergius declared his opponents to be politically motivated. Thus in his Declaration he said: "The establishment of Soviet power seemed to many to be a kind of misunderstanding, accidental and therefore not long-lasting... To such people, who do not wish to understand 'the signs of the times', it may seem that it is impossible to break with the previous regime, and even with the monarchy, without breaking with Orthodoxy." On December 31 he and his Synod declared: "Only those wish to be in administrative separation from us who cannot renounce the idea of Christianity as an external force and are inclined to see the triumph of Christianity in the world only in the domination of Christian peoples over non-Christian ones" – in other words, in capitalist imperialism. Again, to the Petrograd delegation he said in the same month: "You are hindered from accepting my appeal by a political counter-revolutionary ideology."

The truth, however, was that it was Sergius, not his opponents, who were motivated by political considerations – in particular, his need to please his political communist masters. So the accusations were hypocritical. In any case, if his opponents' crimes were political, it was not for him to impose ecclesiastical bans on them – as he himself had recognized in 1926.

And yet this is precisely what he did, as we have seen. Moreover, he went so far as to call the Catacomb Church graceless. On August 6, 1929 his synod declared: "The sacraments performed in separation from Church unity... by the followers of the former Metropolitan Joseph (Petrovykh) of Leningrad, the former Bishop Demetrius (Lyubimov) of Gdov, the former Bishop Alexis (Buj) of Urazov, as also of those who are under ban, are also invalid, and those who are converted from these schisms, if they have been baptized in schism, are to be received through Holy Chrismation."

However, as even the sergianist Bishop Manuel (Lemeshevsky) had to admit, these "schismatics" were among the finest hierarchs of the Russian Church: "It is the best pastors who have fallen away and cut themselves off, those who by their purity in the struggle with renovationism stood much higher than the others."

How many bishops supported Sergius?

According to Sergius Shumilo, "in a letter to his deputy, Archbishop Demetrius (Lyubimov) of Gdov, Metropolitan Joseph (Petrovich) of Petrograd wrote that already by the beginning of 1928 26 bishops had separated from Metropolitan Sergius. By the beginning of the 1930s, they

already numbered about 40. Gradually their number increased still further. All these hierarchs had zealously opposed renovationism and remained faithful to Patriarch Tikhon in 1922-1923 (let us recall that in 1922 only 36 bishops remained faithful to the 'Tikhonite' church, while 37 (headed by Metropolitan Sergius (Stragorodsky) and Alexis (Simansky) recognized the renovationist 'HCA'").

According to another estimate, out of the approximately 150 Russian bishops in 1927, 80 declared themselves definitely against the declaration, 17 separated from Sergius but did not make their position clear, and 9 at first separated but later changed their mind. These figures probably do not take into account all the secret bishops consecrated by the Ufa Autocephaly. In 1930 Sergius claimed he had 70% of the Orthodox bishops (not including the renovationists and Gregorians), which implies that about 30% of the Russian episcopate joined the Catacomb Church. According to the Catholic Bishop Michel D'Erbigny, once the Vatican's representative in Russia, three quarters of the episcopate separated from him; but this is probably an exaggeration.

In 1929, the Bolsheviks began to imprison the True Orthodox on the basis of membership of a "church monarchist organization" called "True Orthodoxy". The main case against the True Orthodox was called the case of "The All-Union Counter-Revolutionary Church Monarchist Organization, 'the True Orthodox Church'". Osipova notes that the numbers of True Orthodox Christians arrested between 1929 and 1933 exceeded by seven times the numbers of clergy repressed from 1924 to 1928. In 1929 5000 clergy were repressed, three times more than in 1928; in 1930 - 13,000; in 1931-32 - 19,000.

It is hardly a coincidence that this persecution of the Church took place against the background of collectivization and a general attack on religion spearheaded by Yaroslavsky's League of Militant Godless (who numbered 17 million by 1933).

Vladimir Rusak writes: "1928, the beginning of collectivisation. Stalin could no longer 'leave the Church in the countryside'. In one interview he gave at that time he directly complained against 'the reactionary clergy' who were poisoning the souls of the masses. 'The only thing I can complain about is that the clergy was not liquidated root and branch,' he said. At the 15th Congress of the party he demanded that all weariness in the anti-religious struggle be overcome."

Also in 1928, economic cooperatives and all philanthropic organizations were banned. Then came the real killer, collectivization, which, together with the artificial famine that followed, claimed as many as 14 million lives. Collectivization can be seen as an attempt to destroy

religion in its stronghold, the countryside, by destroying the economic base of village life and forcing all the villagers into communes completely dependent on the State. The peasants, led by their priests, put up a fierce opposition to it, and many were brought to trial and sentenced to the camps.

Husband writes: "On 8 April 1929, the VtsIK and Sovnarkom declaration 'On Religious Associations' largely superseded the 1918 separation of church and state and redefined freedom of conscience. Though reiterating central aspects of the 1918 separation decree, the new law introduced important limitations. Religious associations of twenty or more adults were allowed, but only if registered and approved in advance by government authorities. They retained their previous right to the free use of buildings for worship but still could not exist as a judicial person. Most important, the new regulations rescinded the previously guaranteed [!] right to conduct religious propaganda, and it reaffirmed the ban on religious instructions in state educational institutions. In effect, proselytising and instruction outside the home were illegal except in officially sanctioned classes, and religious rights of assembly and property were now more circumscribed."

"Henceforth," writes Nicholas Werth, "any activity 'going beyond the limits of the simple satisfaction of religious aspirations' fell under the law. Notably, section 10 of the much-feared Article 58 of the penal code stipulated that 'any use of the religious prejudices of the masses... for destabilizing the state' was punishable 'by anything from a minimum three-year sentence up to and including the death penalty'. On 26 August 1929 the government instituted the new five-day work week – five days of work, and one day of rest – which made it impossible to observe Sunday as a day of rest. This measure deliberately introduced 'to facilitate the struggle to eliminate religion'.

"These decrees were no more than a prelude to a second, much larger phase of the antireligious campaign. In October 1929 the seizure of all church bells was ordered because 'the sound of bells disturbs the right to peace of the vast majority of atheists in the towns and the countryside'. Anyone closely associated with the church was treated like a kulak and forced to pay special taxes. The taxes paid by religious leaders increased tenfold from 1928 to 1930, and the leaders were stripped of their civil rights, which meant that they lost their ration cards and their right to medical care. Many were arrested, exiled, or deported. According to the incomplete records, more than 13,000 priests were 'dekulakised' in 1930. In many villages and towns, collectivisation began symbolically with the closure of the church, and dekulakization began with the removal of the local religious leaders. Significantly, nearly 14 percent of riots and peasant uprisings in 1930 were sparked by the closure of a church or the removal

of its bells. The antireligious campaign reached its height in the winter of 1929-30; by 1 March 1930, 6,715 churches had been closed or destroyed. In the aftermath of Stalin's famous article 'Dizzy with Success' on 2 March 1930, a resolution from the Central Committee cynically condemned 'inadmissible deviations in the struggle against religious prejudices, particularly the administrative closure of churches without the consent of the local inhabitants'. This formal condemnation had no effect on the fate of the people deported on religious grounds.

"Over the next few years these great offensives against the church were replaced by daily administrative harassment of priests and religious organizations. Freely interpreting the sixty-eight articles of the government decree of 8 April 1929, and going considerably beyond their mandate when it came to the closure of churches, local authorities continued their guerrilla war with a series of justifications: 'unsanitary condition or extreme age' of the buildings in question, 'unpaid insurance', and non-payment of taxes or other of the innumerable contributions imposed on the members of religious communities. Stripped of their civil rights and their right to teach, and without the possibility of taking up other paid employment – a status that left them arbitrarily classified as 'parasitic elements living on unearned wages' – a number of priests had no option but to become peripatetic and to lead a secret life on the edges of society."

Vladimir Rusak writes: "[In 1929] about 15 hierarchs who did not share the position of Metropolitan Sergius were arrested. Metropolitan Cyril, the main 'opponent' of Metropolitan Sergius, was exiled to Turukhansk in June-July. The arrest procedure looked something like this: an agent of the GPU appeared before a bishop and put him a direct question: what is your attitude to the Declaration of Metropolitan Sergius? If the bishop replied that he did not recognize it, the agent drew the conclusion: that means that you are a counter-revolutionary. The bishop was arrested."

Although the believers could not stop the might of the totalitarian state, God sometimes put the persecutors to flight. Thus the Catacomb Christian P.M. writes: "I want to tell about the miracles of God of which I was a witness. In our village they closed the church and made it into a club. And then they declared that they would be showing a film – this was the first opening of the club. In the church everything was as it had been before, even the iconostasis was standing with its icons. They put in benches, hung up a screen and began to show the film. About half an hour passed, and then suddenly the people began to shout. Those who were at the back jumped up and rushed towards the exit, while those in front fell on the floor or crawled under the benches. What had happened? As many people later recounted, the holy Great Martyr George came out of an icon that was on the iconostasis on a horse, and taking a spear, galloped at the

people, who began to flee in fear. But that was not the end of it. Somehow they got at any rate some of the people together again and continued to show the film. It was being shown by a mechanic and his assistant. And suddenly up in the choir they began to sing the Cherubic hymn – and so loudly that the film was scarcely audible. At that point they decided that some believers had climbed up and wanted to interrupt the showing of the film. So about seven members of the Komsomol and the assistant climbed up in order to catch them all and bring them down. But then they said that when they had climbed up the stairs the singing stopped, and they rejoiced – the believers had got frightened and fallen silent. But when they climbed up into the choir they saw that it was empty. They stood in bewilderment and could not understand how the singers could have run away. And then suddenly in the midst of them unseen singers began to sing the Cherubic hymn. Pursued by an unknown fear, they rushed to get out, not knowing the way, pushing and shoving each other. The assistant mechanic, who was running in front, suddenly fell down, and everyone ran over him since there was no other way because of the narrowness of the place. Having run down, they rushed out into the street. Now the showing was finally abandoned. The assistant mechanic was ill for a month and died, while the mechanic left, and nobody wanted to go to work in the club as a mechanic for any money. So from that time they stopped having a cinema in it.”

This persecution began to arouse criticism in the West, from Pope Pius XI and the Archbishop of Canterbury. On February 14, 1930 the Politburo decided “to entrust to Comrades Yaroslavsky, Stalin and Molotov the decision of the question of an interview” to counter-act these criticisms. The result was two interviews, the first to Soviet correspondents on February 15 and published on February 16 in *Izvestia* and *Pravda* in the name of Sergius and those members of his Synod who were still in freedom, and a second to foreign correspondents three days later. In the first interview, which is now thought to have been composed entirely by the Bolsheviks with the active participation of Stalin, but whose authenticity was never denied by Sergius, it was asserted that “in the Soviet Union there was not and is not now any religious persecution”, that “churches are closed not on the orders of the authorities, but at the wish of the population, and in many cases even at the request of the believers”, that “the priests themselves are to blame, because they do not use the opportunities presented to them by the freedom to preach” and that “the Church herself does not want to have any theological-educational institutions”.

This interview, writes Fr. Stefan Krasovitsky, “was especially absurd and scandalous in the eyes of the simple people in that the universally venerated chapel of the Iveron Icon of the Mother of God had just been destroyed. As N. Talberg writes, ‘the Russian people, fearing not even the

chekists, demonstrated their attitude to him (Metropolitan Sergius)... When Metropolitan Sergius went to serve in one of the large churches of Moscow, the crowd whistled at him in the streets, which had never happened before in spite of the most desperate agitation of the atheists. Bishop Pitirim, one of those who had signed the declaration in the press, was also whistled at and met in the same way. *Paris-Midi* for March 5 (№ 1392) informed its readers of the insults Metropolitan Sergius had been subjected to by his flock in Moscow. *Vozrozhdenie* for March 6 (№ 178) printed the report of the Berlin *Lokale Anzeiger* to the effect that when Metropolitan Sergius 'came out of the altar to serve the Liturgy, the crowd began to whistle and showered him with brickbats: "traitor", "Judas", "coward", etc. The noise was so great that Metropolitan Sergius was not able to serve and went into the crowd to pacify them. But the aroused parishioners tried to tear his vestments from him, spat at him and wanted to take off his patriarchal cross. Metropolitan Sergius had to leave the church. He tried to serve the Liturgy in another church, but the believers boycotted his service.' The Roman newspaper *Today* (№ 64), reporting the same incident, added that 'not one person' appeared at the service arranged by Metropolitan Sergius for the other church."

Commenting on the interview, Archbishop Andrew of Ufa wrote: "Such is the opinion of the false-head of the false-patriarchal church of Metropolitan Sergius... But who is going to recognize this head after all this? For whom does this lying head remain a head, in spite of his betrayal of Christ?... All the followers of the lying Metropolitan Sergius... have fallen away from the Church of Christ. The Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church is somewhere else, not near Metropolitan Sergius and not near 'his Synod'."

Religious life did not cease but rather intensified in the underground. Wandering clergy served the faithful in secret locations around the country. Particular areas buzzed with underground activity. Thus Professor Ivan Andreyevsky testified that during the war he personally knew some 200 places of worship of the Catacomb Church in the Leningrad area alone. Popovsky writes that the Catacomb Church "arose in our midst at the end of the 20s. First one, then another priest disappeared from his parish, settled in a secret place and began the dangerous life of exiles. In decrepit little houses on the outskirts of towns chapels appeared. There they served the Liturgy, heard confessions, gave communion, baptized, married and even ordained new priests. Believers from distant towns and regions poured there in secret, passing on to each other the agreed knock on the door."

In these conditions of extreme persecution, it was almost impossible to unite the scattered groups of True Orthodox under a common leadership. But attempts were made... Thus we can infer from a remark of

Hieromartyr Maximus, Bishop of Serpukhov, that there was *some* Catacomb Council in 1928 that anathematized the Sergianists. Another source has described a so-called “Nomadic Council” attended at different times by over 70 bishops in 1928 which likewise anathematized the Sergianists. But hard evidence for the existence of this council has proved hard to obtain, and there are some reasons for suspecting the authenticity of the description of the proceedings.

A “Little Council” of Catacomb bishops took place in Archangelsk in 1935. They met in order to approve an epistle issued in December, 1933 by Archbishop Seraphim of Uglich placing Metropolitan Sergius under ban for the anti-church actions he had committed since 1927: “We declare Metropolitan Sergius, who has violated the purity of the Orthodox faith, who has distorted the dogma of Salvation and of the Church, and who has caused a schism and blasphemed against the Church of Christ and Her confessors, and in scattering the Church has also blasphemed against the Holy Spirit, to be deprived of communion in prayer with us and with all the Orthodox bishops of the Russian Church. We commit him to ecclesiastical trial and ban him from serving. The bishops who think like Metropolitan Sergius are accepted by us into canonical and prayerful communion in accordance with the rite of reception from renovationism.” One of those participating in this Council was Archbishop Theodore of Volokolamsk.

8. ROCOR AND METROPOLITAN SERGIUS

Probably late in 1927, Metropolitan Anthony (Khrapovitsky) wrote: "Now everywhere two epistles are being published in the newspapers and are being read in many churches which until recently were Orthodox – epistles of two, alas, former beloved pupils of mine with whom I was once in agreement, Metropolitans Sergius and Eulogius, who have now fallen away from the saving unity of the Church and have bound themselves to the enemies of Christ and the Holy Church – the disgusting blaspheming Bolsheviks, who have submitted themselves in everything to the representatives of the Jewish false teaching which everywhere goes under the name of communism or materialism... Let these new deceivers not justify themselves by declaring that they are not the friends of the Bolsheviks and Jews who stand at the head of the Bolshevik kingdom: in their souls they may not be their friends, but they have submitted, albeit unwillingly, to these enemies of Christ, and they are trying to increase their power not only over the hapless inhabitants of Holy Russia, but also over all Russian people."

On September 1, 1927, Archbishop Theophan of Poltava wrote: "It is impossible to recognize the epistle of Metropolitan Sergius as obligatory for ourselves. The just-completed Council of Bishops rejected this epistle. It was necessary to act in this way on the basis of the teaching of the Holy Fathers on what should be recognized as a canonical power to which Christians must submit. St. Isidore of Pelusium, having pointed to the presence of the God-established order of the submission of some to others everywhere in the life of rational and irrational beings, draws the conclusion: 'Therefore we are right to say that the thing in itself, I mean power, that is, authority and royal power, have been established by God. But if a lawless evildoer seizes this power, we do not affirm that he has been sent by God, but we say that he, like Pharaoh, has been *permitted* to spew out this cunning and thereby inflict extreme punishment on and bring to their senses those for whom cruelty was necessary, just as the King of Babylon brought the Jews to their senses.' (*Works*, part II, letter 6). Bolshevik power in its essence is an antichristian power and there is no way that it can be recognized as God-established."

On September 5, the Hierarchical Council of ROCOR declared:

"1. The abroad part of the all-Russian Church must cease relations with the Moscow church authorities in view of the impossibility of normal relations with them and in view of its enslavement to the atheist Soviet power which deprives it of its freedom in its administration of the Church.

"2. So as to free our hierarchy in Russia from responsibility for the non-

recognition of Soviet power by the abroad part of our Church, until the re-establishment of normal relations with Russia and until the liberation of our Church from the persecutions of Soviet power, the abroad part of our Church must administer itself in accordance with the sacred canons, the definitions of the Sacred Council of the All-Russian Local Orthodox Church of 1917-18 and the decree of his Holiness Patriarch Tikhon and the Higher Administrative Council of November 7/20, 1920, with the help of the Hierarchical Synod and the Council of Bishops, under the presidency of Metropolitan Anthony of Kiev.

“3. The abroad part of the Russian Church considers itself to be an inseparable, spiritually-at-one branch of the Great Russian Church. It does not separate itself from its Mother Church and does not consider itself autocephalous. As before, it considers its head to be the Patriarchal Locum Tenens Metropolitan Peter and commemorates his name in Divine services.

“4. If there will come a decree of Metropolitan Sergius and his Synod on the exclusion of the abroad bishops and clergy who do not want to sign their loyalty to the Soviet government from the clergy of the Moscow Patriarchate, this decree will be uncanonical.”

On May 9, 1928 Metropolitan Sergius threatened to ban the ROCOR hierarchs if they did not dissolve their Administration. On June 20, his Synod issued another ukaz to the Church Abroad declaring that any clergyman who recognized the Moscow Synod but did not accept Soviet citizenship would be removed from his post. Nobody obeyed this ukaz...

On September 10, 1928, Metropolitan Anthony issued “the completely definitive declaration of our Synod of Bishops that the Moscow Synod has deprived itself of all authority, since it has entered into agreement with the atheists, and without offering any resistance it has tolerated the closing and destruction of the holy churches, and the other innumerable crimes of the Soviet government... That illegally formed organization which has entered into union with God’s enemies, which Metropolitan Sergius calls an Orthodox Synod – but which the best Russian hierarchs, clergy and laymen have refused to recognize – ... must not be recognized by our Orthodox Churches, nor by our Synod of Bishops with its flock here abroad. Furthermore, the organization of the Moscow Synod must be recognized to be exactly the same sort of apostates from the Faith as the ancient libellatici, that is, Christians who although they refused to blaspheme openly against Christ and offer sacrifices to the idols, nevertheless still received from the priests of the idols false documents verifying that they were in complete accord with the adherents of pagan religion...”

Early in 1930, just after Sergius had given his interview denying that there had ever been persecutions against the faith in Soviet Russia, the archbishop of Canterbury invited Metropolitan Eulogius of Paris to go to London for one day of prayers for the suffering Church of Russia. "I decided to go," he wrote. "The whole of England will pray for us, and I will remain in Paris as a witness of the unanimous sympathy of all the Churches for our suffering Church, but not take part? Impossible! My conscience ordered me to take part in these prayers; and my flock undoubtedly felt the same way.

"I spent about a week in England. It is a long time since I experienced such a radiant feeling of brotherly Christian love between the Churches as I experienced in those unforgettable days, when the whole of ecclesiastical and believing England prayed on her knees for a cessation of the terrible sufferings of our Russian Orthodox Church... I pursued no political aims in England, and nowhere gave political speeches. Everywhere that I had to give speeches I only gave thanks for their sympathy and asked them to support our suffering Mother Church by their prayers. And now these speeches have served as an excuse for a strict inquiry from Metropolitan Sergius in Moscow: on what basis could I allow myself to go round England calling people to protest against the USSR? Then it was demanded that I condemn my journey and give an undertaking not to repeat such speeches... It was bitter for me to read these unjust reproaches, which were dictated by Soviet power, and I replied sharply to Metropolitan Sergius that my prayers in England did not have a political, but only a religious character: it was a protest of the religious and in general the human conscience against the terrible persecutions against the Church in Soviet Russia..."

On June 10, 1930, Sergius retired Metropolitan Eulogius from his post administering the Russian parishes in Western Europe. On July 10 Eulogius broke communion with the MP, and in February was received by Constantinople...

On May 6, 1933 Metropolitan Anthony wrote to Sergius, who had reproached the ROCOR bishops for abandoning their sees: "... It is not from you and not for us to hear an exhortation to martyrdom, which we would not have avoided if we had stayed in the South of Russia. We are ready to listen to it and to many such reproaches, if we deserve them, from those who even now display an example of confession, and have not, like you, sold the purity of the faith for a mess of pottage of seeming freedom, which is in fact the most heavy and shameful slavery..."

"What divides you from us is the fact that you, in your desire to guarantee a secure existence for your ecclesiastical centre, have tried to unite light with darkness. You have fallen into the temptation whose

essence was revealed in the holy Gospel. Once the spirit of evil tried to draw even the Son of God Himself by a picture of external easy success, placing as a condition His worship of him, the son of destruction. You have not followed the example of Christ, the holy martyrs and confessors, who rejected such a compromise, but have bowed down to the age-old enemy of our salvation, when, for the sake of an illusory success, for the sake of the preservation of an external organization, you declared that the joys of the godless authorities are your joys and its enemies your enemies. You even tried to remove the crowns from the recent martyrs and confessors (including yourself, for I know that once you showed firmness and were in prison), affirming that they are suffering imprisonment, exile and torments not for the name of Christ, but as counter-revolutionaries. In this way you blasphemed against them. You denigrated their exploit, and dampened the enthusiasm of those who could have been numbered to the ranks of the martyrs for the faith. You excommunicated them from the flower and adornment of the Russian church. In this neither I nor my brothers abroad will ever follow you... We have no intercourse with the Orthodox archpastors, pastors and laymen who are imprisoned in Russia, except that we pray for them and know that they suffer only for the faith, though the persecutors charge them with State crimes which are alien to them, as the enemies of the Christians loved to do in ancient times... For you the way of the cross is now madness like it was to the Greeks contemporary with the Apostles (I Corinthians 1.23). I implore you, as a pupil and friend, free yourself from this temptation, renounce publicly every lie which Tuchkov and other enemies of the Church have put into your mouth, do not yield in the face of probably tortures. If you are counted worthy of a martyr's crown, the earthly and heavenly Churches will combine in glorification of your courage and of the Lord Who strengthened you; but if you stay on this wide path leading you to perdition (Matthew 7.13), on which you stand now, you will be ignominiously led to the pit of hell and until the end of its earthly existence the Church will not forget your betrayal. I always think of this when I look at the panagia of the Vladimir Mother of God with the engraved inscription which you presented to me twenty years ago: 'To a dear teacher and friend.' Your further words in this inscription are: 'give us some of your oil, for our lamps are fading.' Here we offer you the salutary oil of faith and loyalty in the Holy Church. *Do not refuse it, but reunite with it* as in 1922 when you solemnly declared to Patriarch Tikhon your repentance for your former wavering loyalty. Do not refuse the friendly appeal of one who tenderly loved you and continues to love you. Metropolitan Anthony."

On July 8, 1933 the Hierarchical Council of ROCOR issued an encyclical to the Russian Orthodox flock with regard to Sergius' epistle of March 23: "His appeal in its essence remains the same as it was in 1927 and can be formulated in the words: he who is with Soviet power is with the Russian Church; he who is against the former cannot be with the latter. In this way

the link with the Mother Church can be realized for us in no other way than by accepting the God-fighting authorities that now rule in Russia. Before stretching out the hand of communion with Metropolitan Sergius, we must stretch it out first to the Bolsheviks and receive from them attestation of our political reliability, without which the deputy of the locum tenens cannot re-establish fraternal and canonical union with us..."

At the same time, this encyclical, - penned, according to Archbishop Nikon of Washington, by Metropolitan Anastasy, - declared: "As regards relations toward the Mother Church, the Russian ecclesial organization abroad has considered itself no more than a branch of the latter, bound organically to the whole body of the Church of Russia, even though temporarily deprived only of outward unity with the latter in ecclesiastical administration."

"To the present day the entire Church organization abroad has considered and still considers itself an extraordinary and temporary institution, which must be abolished without delay after the restoration of normal social and ecclesiastical life in Russia.

"We are taking fully into account the extraordinary difficulties of the position of Metropolitan Sergius, who is now the de facto head of the Church of Russia, and are aware of the heavy burden of responsibility for the fate of the latter, which lies upon him. No one, therefore, has the audacity to accuse him for the mere attempt to enter into dialogue with the Soviet regime so as to obtain legal standing for the Church of Russia. Not without foundation does the deputy locum tenens of the Patriarchal Throne say in his aforementioned Declaration that only 'armchair dreamers can think that such a vast community as our Orthodox Church, with all its organization, can exist peacefully in a country while walling itself off from the authorities.' While the church exists on earth, it remains closely bound up with the fates of human society and cannot be imagined outside time and space. It is impossible for it to refrain from all contact with a powerful societal organization such as the government; otherwise it would have to leave the world."

However, in his 1934 Paschal encyclical Metropolitan Anthony was stricter: "It is noteworthy that several hierarchs and their flocks, for the most part Russians, have already fallen away from Ecumenical unity, and to the question: 'What do you believe?', reply with references to self-proclaimed heads of all sorts of schisms in Moscow, America, and Western Europe. It is clear that, without admitting it, they have ceased to believe in the unity of the Church throughout the world. They try to bear calmly the refusal of the true Church to have relations with them, and imagine that one can save one's soul even without communion with Her... Unfortunately, some Orthodox laymen, even, alas, many priests (and hierarchs) have subjected themselves to this state of gracelessness,

although still retaining the outward appearance of the church services and the apparent performance of the Mysteries...”

On July 5, 1934, Metropolitan Sergius banned the ROCOR hierarchs. On August 7, Metropolitan Anthony wrote to Metropolitan Eleutherius of Lithuania explaining that he could not accept this ban because “a hierarch cannot be removed from his see except through a trial”. Now Eleutherius was a supporter of Sergius, and on the departure of Metropolitan Eulogius for Constantinople was entrusted with oversight of the patriarchal parishes in Western Europe. In 1935 he published a book defending the MP against ROCOR and Metropolitan Anthony, in which he argued that while Soviet power acted in the religious sphere “by the inspiration of Satan”, Christians were still bound to obey it, because “all power is from God”. If they obeyed Soviet power, as God commanded, then Soviet power, “would see this, and the Spirit of God would proclaim good things for the Church through it”.

Professor Ivan Ilyin subjected this argument to detailed criticism. The communists could not be simultaneously servants of God and servants of Satan. If they were acting “by the inspiration of Satan”, as was clearly the case, then they had to be opposed. In any case, Church history contained many examples of hierarchs refusing to obey the secular authorities, beginning with the apostles who told the Sanhedrin: “we must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5.29).

Ilyin quotes “the law of freedom” (James 1.25; I Peter 2.16) to illumine the meaning of the words “all power is from God”. They “signify not that power is unrestrained, but that it is bound and limited. ‘Being from God’ *means being called* to the service of God and *undertaking* this service; it binds and limits this power. It does not mean that the power is free to do any baseness or abomination, sin or iniquity, and that, whatever it does, it will always ‘come from God’, and that obedience in conscience will be demanded by it from its subjects as if it were the voice of God. But it means that the power is established by God *for the doing of good and the overcoming of evil*; that it must rule precisely in this way, and not otherwise. And if it does rule in this way, the subjects are obliged to obey it out of conscience.

“Thus the calling of the power by God becomes for it a rule and obligation, as it were a court before the face of God. While the free obedience of subjects according to conscience turns out to be strengthened, but also limited, by this law. But how far is it ‘limited’? To the extent that the law of Christian freedom calls them to loyalty or forbids them to show loyalty.

“And it is precisely to this freedom, infused with love, conscience and

clear perception of its object, that we must turn for an exit when the power turns out to be in the hands of Satan, whom we can in no way serve or want to serve – neither out of fear, nor for conscience’s sake. We can and must serve only God, for we are ‘servants of God’ (1 Peter 2.16); we are called to serve Him *in freedom*, speaking and acting as people who must be judged, not according to the letter of the Scripture, but according to the law of freedom. And if it turns out that according to our free and object-directed Christian conscience (not out of arbitrariness or passion!), this power is satanic, then we are called to condemn it, refuse to obey it and conduct a struggle against it in word and deed, by no means using our Christian freedom in order to cover up evil, that is, without distorting the voice of our Christian conscience, and not embellishing the words of Satan and not ascribing them in crookedness of soul to Christ...”

The issue dividing ROCOR and Metropolitan Sergius is often described by the supporters of Sergius as “political” – a question only of the political recognition of the Soviet regime. However, as the Catacomb confessor Professor Ivan Andreyev pointed out: “To dissociate oneself in principle from any politics is impossible for an Orthodox person, for religion and politics are at the present time organically blended. The question: to be with Christ or against Him, has a political meaning today, because it commits one to protesting against those political systems which have as their main goal the destruction of Christianity. Whoever at the present time denies the necessity of political discussions (reasoning) and jurisdictional explanations (interpretations) denies the necessity of distinguishing the wolves in sheep’s clothing and finding out where Christ is and where the Antichrist...”

9. THREE HOLY HIEROMARTYRS

In May, 1932, Stalin declared an anti-religious five-year plan: by 1936 the last church was to be closed, and by 1937 the name of God would no longer be pronounced in the Soviet Union. By the beginning of 1933 half the churches in the land had been closed or destroyed. But the census of 1937 established that two-thirds of the peasantry and one-third of the city-dwellers still maintained their faith in God. This impressive figure owed nothing to Sergius' pact with the State, which divided the faithful and gave the atheists a powerful weapon against them.

In 1933 Metropolitan Sergius stated officially in the *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate* that he "as the deputy of Metropolitan Peter, had not only the temporary authority of the First Hierarch but the Patriarchal Power as well". He also declared that Metropolitan Peter, the lawful First Hierarch, did not have the right "to interfere in the administration of the Church or even correct the mistakes of his deputy." As a result of this statement, Bishop Athanasius (Sakharov) of Kovrov broke communion with Sergius, as he stated in a letter to him on his return from exile in December, 1933.

In April, 1934 Sergius' Synod gave him the title of Metropolitan of Kolomna, thereby making him in effect an "adulterer bishop", for the true holder of the see, Metropolitan Peter, was still alive. In 1935 Metropolitan Peter returned to Moscow and met Metropolitan Sergius. The latter asked him to recognize the new construction of Church life and to agree to the convening of a Council. On his side, Metropolitan Peter demanded that Sergius return Church power to him. Sergius refused, and Peter returned to the camps. In August, 1936, the NKVD spread the rumour that Metropolitan Peter had died. The Sergianist Synod promptly – and completely uncanonically – passed a resolution transferring the rights and duties of the patriarchal locum tenency to Metropolitan Sergius.

In view of this further departure of Metropolitan Sergius from the holy canons, it may be asked what was the reaction of the leading hierarchs of the Catacomb Church – Metropolitan Peter of Krutitsa, the patriarchal locum tenens and de jure leader of the Church, Metropolitan Joseph of Petrograd, her de facto leader, and Metropolitan Cyril of Kazan, the first locum tenens appointed by Patriarch Tikhon and the favoured candidate of the Russian episcopate for the role of patriarch.

Metropolitan Peter's attitude was particularly important to ascertain in view of the fact that both the True Orthodox and the sergianists formally acknowledged him as the Church's first hierarch. Earlier, Bishop Damascene of Glukhov had claimed to have made contact with him

through his cell-attendant, who reported that Metropolitan Peter expressed disapproval of Sergius' policies. Thus on January 22, 1928 he wrote to a certain N. "For a first-hierarchy such an appeal [as Sergius' declaration] is *inadmissible*. Moreover, I don't understand why a Synod was formed from (as I can see from the signatures under the appeal) unreliable people. Thus, for example, Bishop Philip is a heretic... In this appeal a shadow is cast upon me and the patriarch, as if we had political relations with abroad, whereas the only relations were ecclesiastical. I do not belong to the irreconcilables, I allowed everything that could be allowed, and it was suggested to me in a more polite manner that I sign the appeal. I refused, for which I was exiled. I trusted Metropolitan Sergius, and I see that I was mistaken."

On September 17, 1929, the priest Gregory Seletsky wrote to Metropolitan Joseph of Petrograd on behalf of Archbishop Demetrius (Lyubimov): "I am fulfilling the request of his Eminence Archbishop Demetrius and set out before you in written form that information which the exiled Bishop Damascene has communicated to me. He succeeded in making contact with Metropolitan Peter, and in sending him, via a trusted person, full information about everything that has been taking place in the Russian Church. Through this emissary Metropolitan Peter said the following to him: '1. You Bishops must yourselves remove Metropolitan Sergius. '2. I do not bless you to commemorate Metropolitan Sergius during Divine services..."

In December, 1929 Metropolitan Peter wrote to Sergius: "Your Eminence, forgive me magnanimously if by the present letter I disturb the peace of your Eminence's soul. People inform me about the difficult circumstances that have formed for the Church in connection with the exceeding of the limits of the ecclesiastical authority entrusted to you. I am very sorry that you have not taken the trouble to initiate me into your plans for the administration of the Church. You know that I have not renounced the locum tenancy, and consequently, I have retained for myself the Higher Church Administration and the general leadership of Church life. At the same time I make bold to declare that your remit as deputy was only for the management of everyday affairs; you are only to preserve the status quo. I am profoundly convinced that without prior contact with me you will not make any responsible decision. I have not accorded you any constituent right as long as I retain the locum tenancy and as long as Metropolitan Cyril is alive and as long as Metropolitan Agathangelus was alive. Therefore I did not consider it necessary in my decree concerning the appointment of candidates for the deputyship to mention the limitation of their duties; I had no doubt that the deputy would not alter the established rights, but would only deputize, or represent, so to speak, the central organ through which the locum tenens could communicate with his flock. But the system of administration you

have introduced not only excludes this: it also excludes the very need for the existence of the locum tenens. Such major steps cannot, of course, be approved by the consciousness of the Church. I did not admit any qualifications limiting the duties of the deputy, both from a feeling of deep reverence and trust for the appointed candidates, and first of all for you, having in mind at this point your wisdom. It is burdensome for me to number all the details of negative evaluations of your administration: the resounding protests and cries from believers, from hierarchs and laypeople. The picture of ecclesiastical division that has been painted is shocking. My duty and conscience do not allow me to remain indifferent to such a sorrowful phenomenon; they urge me to address your Eminence with a most insistent demand that you correct the mistake you have made, which has placed the Church in a humiliating position, and which has caused quarrels and divisions in her and a blackening of the reputation of her leaders. In the same way I ask you to suspend the other measures that have increased your prerogatives. Such a decision of yours will, I hope, create a good atmosphere in the Church and will calm the troubled souls of her children, while with regard to you it will preserve that disposition towards you which you deservedly enjoyed both as a Church figure and as a man. Place all your hope on the Lord, and His help will always be with you. On my part, I as the first-hierarch of the Church, call on all clergy and church activists to display, in everything that touches on the civil legislation and administration, complete loyalty. They are obliged to submit unflinchingly to the governmental decrees as long as they do not violate the holy faith and in general are not contrary to Christian conscience; and they must not engage in any anti-governmental activity, and they are allowed to express neither approval nor disapproval of their actions in the churches or in private conversations, and in general they must not interfere in matters having nothing to do with the Church..."

On February 13/26, 1930, after receiving news from Deacon K. about the true state of affairs in the Church, Metropolitan Peter wrote to Sergius: "Of all the distressing news I have had to receive, the most distressing was the news that many believers remain outside the walls of the churches in which your name is commemorated. I am filled with spiritual pain both about the disputes that have arisen with regard to your administration and about other sad phenomena. Perhaps this information is biased, perhaps I am not sufficiently acquainted with the character and aims of the people writing to me. But the news of disturbances in the Church come to me from various quarters and mainly from clerics and laymen who have made a great impression on me. In my opinion, in view of the exceptional circumstances of Church life, when normal rules of administration have been subject to all kinds of distortion, it is necessary to put Church life on that path on which it stood during your first period as deputy. So be so good as to return to that course of action that was respected by everybody. I repeat that I am very sad that you have not

written to me or confided your plans to me. Since letters come from other people, yours would undoubtedly have reached me..."

From August 17, 1930, after again refusing to renounce the locum tenancy, Metropolitan Peter was imprisoned in Tobolsk and Yekaterinburg prisons in solitary confinement with no right to receive parcels or visitors. On March 11, 1931, after describing the sufferings of his life in Khe (which included the enmity of three renovationist priests), he posed the following question in a letter to J.B. Polyansky: "Will not a change in locum tenens bring with it a change also in his deputy? Of course, it is possible that my successor, if he were to find himself incapable of carrying out his responsibilities directly, would leave the same person as his deputy - that is his right. But it is certain, in my opinion, that the carrying out of his duties by this deputy would have to come to an end at the same time as the departure of the person for whom he is deputizing, just as, according to the declaration of Metropolitan Sergius, with his departure the synod created by him would cease to exist. All this and other questions require thorough and authoritative discussion and canonical underpinning... Be so kind as to bow to Metropolitan Sergius on my behalf, since I am unable to do this myself, and send him my fervent plea that he, together with Metropolitan Seraphim and Archbishop Philip, to whom I also bow, work together for my liberation. I beseech them to defend, an old man who can hardly walk. I was always filled with a feeling of deep veneration and gratitude to Metropolitan Sergius, and the thought of some kind of worsening of our relations would give me indescribable sorrow."

On March 27, Metropolitan Peter wrote to B.P. Menzhinsky: "I was given a five-year exile which I served in the far north in the midst of the cruellest frosts, constant storms, extreme poverty and destitution in everything. (I was constantly on the edge of the grave.) But years passed, and there remained four months to the end of my exile when the same thing began all over again - I was again arrested and imprisoned by the Urals OGPU. After some time I was visited by comrade J.V. Polyansky, who suggested that I renounce the locum tenancy. But I could not accept such a suggestion for the following reasons which have a decisive significance for me. First of all I would be transgressing the established order according to which the locum tenens must remain at his post until the convening of a council. A council convened without the sanction of the locum tenens would be considered uncanonical and its decisions invalid. But in the case of my death the prerogatives of the locum tenens will pass to another person who will complete that which was not done by his predecessor. Moreover, my removal would bring in its wake the departure also of my deputy, Metropolitan Sergius, just as, according to his declaration, with his departure from the position of deputy the Synod created by him would cease to exist. I cannot be indifferent to such a circumstance. Our simultaneous departure does not guarantee church life

from various possible frictions, and, of course, the guilt would be mine. Therefore in the given case it is necessary that we discuss this matter together, just as we discussed together the questions relating to my letter to Metropolitan Sergius dated December, 1929. Finally, my decree, coming from prison, would undoubtedly be interpreted as made under pressure, with various undesirable consequences."

In spite of this strong criticism, it is not known that Metropolitan Peter declared that Metropolitan Sergius had fallen from grace; and according to one (possibly dubious) source, he, together with Metropolitan Cyril, refused to sign the sixth canon of the so-called "Nomadic Council" in 1928, which anathematised the sergianists.

Nevertheless, he continued not only to resist pressure from the OGPU to give up the *locum tenency* himself, but also rejected the right of Metropolitan Sergius to take it over after his death. Thus on March 11, 1931, he posed the following question to I.B. Polyansky: "Will not a change in locum tenens bring with it a change also in his deputy? Of course, it is possible that my successor, if he were to find himself incapable of carrying out his responsibilities directly, would leave the same person as his deputy – that is his right. But it is certain, in my opinion, that the carrying out of his duties by this deputy would have to come to an end at the same time as the departure of the person for whom he is deputizing, just as, according to the declaration of Metropolitan Sergius, with his departure the synod created by him would cease to exist. All this and other questions require thorough and authoritative discussion and canonical underpinning..." He repeated the same argument in a letter to Menzhinsky later that month.

We have no direct evidence for Metropolitan Peter's views after 1931. Indirectly, however, we can infer that his attitude towards Metropolitan Sergius hardened. For, as the True Orthodox Confessor and Professor Ivan Andreyev witnesses, "approval of the position of Metropolitan Joseph [whose views on Sergius are known to have been uncompromisingly severe] was received from the exiled Metropolitan Peter of Krutitsa and from Metropolitan Cyril".

Moreover, "from the fact that in the last years secret relations were established between Metropolitan Peter and Metropolitan Joseph, we may conjecture that Metropolitan Peter gave his blessing, in the event of his death, to Metropolitan Joseph's heading the Russian Church in his capacity as *Extraordinary Locum Tenens*. This right was accorded to Metropolitan Joseph, as is known only to a few, by a Decision of the Local Council of 1917-18 dated January 25, 1918."

Metropolitan Cyril, like Metropolitan Peter, at first took a relatively

“lenient” attitude towards the sergianists. Thus in 1934 he wrote: “If we reproach them for not resisting, and, therefore, of belonging to heresy, we risk depriving them of the psychological opportunity to reunite with us and losing them forever for Orthodoxy.”

This relative leniency has been exploited by those who wish to make out that the MP is a true Church even now, nearly eighty years after Sergius’ declaration. However, there are several reasons for thinking that Cyril was less “moderate” than he has been made out.

First, as his correspondent, another Catacomb hierarch said, he was being “excessively cautious” because of his insufficient knowledge of the Church situation from his position in exile. Secondly, he was in the unique position of being the only legal locum tenens that was able to correspond and reason with Sergius. He therefore naturally steered the dialogue to the theme of the canonical rights of the locum tenentes and their deputies, convicting Sergius of usurpation of the power of the First Hierarchy. Concentrating on the *canonical-administrative* aspect of the matter, without entering into the *dogmatic* aspect of Sergius’ subordination to the atheists, was bound to lead to a less serious estimate of his sin. Nevertheless, in 1934 he wrote that while the Sergianist priests administered valid sacraments, Christians who partook of them knowing of Sergius’ usurpation of power and the illegality of his Synod would receive them *to their condemnation*.

Several points made by Metropolitan Cyril in his correspondence with Metropolitan Sergius are of vital importance in evaluating the significance of the various schisms that have taken place in the Orthodox Church in this century. The first is the priority of “the conciliar hierarchical conscience of the Church”. As he wrote in 1929: “Church discipline is able to retain its validity only as long as it is a true reflection of the hierarchical conscience of the Conciliar [Sobornoj] Church; discipline can never take the place of this conscience”. Sergius violated the hierarchical, conciliar conscience of the Church by his disregard of the views of bishops equal to him in rank.

The second is that a hierarch is justified in breaking communion with a fellow hierarch, not only for heresy, but also in order not to partake in his brother’s sin. Thus while Metropolitan Cyril did not consider Sergius to have sinned in matters of faith, he was forced to break communion with him because “I have no other means of rebuking my sinning brother”. If clergy have mutually opposing opinions within the Church, then their concelebration is for both “to judgement and condemnation”.

Again, in November, 1929, Metropolitan Cyril refused to condemn Metropolitan Joseph and his supporters, who had broken communion with

Sergius; and he did not agree with the bishops in exile in Tashkent – Arsenius (Stadnitsky), Nicodemus (Krotkov), Nicander (Fenomenov) and others – who condemned Joseph, considering their hopes of convening a canonical Council to be “naivety or cunning”.

Thirdly, while Metropolitan Cyril did not deny the sacraments of the sergianists, he did so only in respect of those clergy who had been *correctly ordained*, i.e. by non-sergianist hierarchs.

A fourth point made by the metropolitan was that even when such a break in communion occurs between two parties, both sides remain in the Church so long as dogmatic unanimity is preserved. But this immediately raised the question: had Sergius only sinned “administratively”, by transgressing against the canons, as Metropolitan Cyril claimed (until 1934, at any rate), or had he sinned also “dogmatically”, by transgressing against the dogma of the One Church, as Archbishop Demetrius of Gdov, among others, claimed?

In about the middle of the 1930s Metropolitan Cyril issued an epistle in which he called on the Catacomb hierarchs to confirm his candidacy as the lawful patriarchal locum tenens in the case of the death of Metropolitan Peter. We know the reaction of one hierarch, Archbishop Theodore of Volokolamsk, to this epistle. He was not enthusiastic, because he considered that in times of persecution a centralized administration was not obligatory for the Church. In any case, at some time in the 1930s, as we have seen, both Metropolitan Peter and Metropolitan Cyril came to accept that Metropolitan *Joseph* should lead the Russian Church in the event of Metropolitan Peter’s death.

Metropolitan Cyril’s position hardened towards the end of his life. Thus in March, 1937 he wrote: “With regard to your perplexities concerning Sergianism, I can say that the very same questions in almost the same form were addressed to me from Kazan ten years ago, and then I replied affirmatively to them, because I considered everything that Metropolitan Sergius had done as a mistake which he himself was conscious of and wished to correct. Moreover, among our ordinary flock there were many people who had not investigated what had happened, and it was impossible to demand from them a decisive and active condemnation of the events. Since then much water has flowed under the bridge. The expectations that Metropolitan Sergius would correct himself have not been justified, *but there has been enough time for the formerly ignorant members of the Church, enough incentive and enough opportunity to investigate what has happened*; and very many have both investigated and understood that Metropolitan Sergius is departing from that Orthodox Church which the Holy Patriarch Tikhon entrusted to us to guard, and consequently there can be no part or lot with him for the Orthodox. The

recent events have finally made clear the renovationist nature of Sergianism. We cannot know whether those believers who remain in Sergianism will be saved, because the work of eternal Salvation is a work of the mercy and grace of God. But for those who see and feel the unrighteousness of Sergianism (those are your questions) it would be unforgiveable craftiness to close one's eyes to this unrighteousness and seek there for the satisfaction of one's spiritual needs when one's conscience doubts in the possibility of receiving such satisfaction. Everything which is not of faith is sin..."

This is an important document, for it shows that by 1937 Metropolitan Cyril considered that enough time had passed for the ordinary believer to come to a correct conclusion concerning the true, "renovationist" – that is, *heretical* – nature of Sergianism. So from 1937, in Metropolitan Cyril's opinion, "the excuse of ignorance" was no longer valid. What had been involuntary ignorance in the early days of the schism was now (except in exceptional circumstances caused by, for example, extreme youth or mental deficiency) *witting* ignorance – that is, *indifference to the truth or refusal to face the truth*.

This view is confirmed by Schema-Monk Epiphanius, who writes that during their imprisonment together in Chimkent, "when they let Metropolitans Cyril and Joseph go out for a walk, they stuck together: the tall Metropolitan Joseph and the stocky, short Metropolitan Cyril. And these two figures, as it seemed, merged into one, symbolising 'the unity of two in one'. The metropolitans walked in a circle and were continually engaged in conversation – after all, it was impossible to overhear them there. And during their walk they were constantly watched from a hill by some Catacomb nuns to whom the metropolitans, at the end of their walk, gave their blessing – it was necessary to disguise this, so that the guards should not notice their secret signalling."

"And this signalling, as was later made known by these same Catacomb nuns, consisted further in the following sign: that when Metropolitan Cyril several times bowed beneath the elbow of Metropolitan Joseph, this meant that he completely recognized the authority and leadership of the latter for himself."

10. SECRET CATACOMB COUNCILS

On November 20, 1937, Metropolitans Joseph and Cyril were shot together in Chimkent. Following on the shooting of Metropolitan Peter on October 10, this meant that all of the holy patriarch's locum tenentes, both "ordinary" and "extraordinary", were now dead... The martyrdom of the last de jure and de facto leaders of the Catacomb Church placed the Russian Church in an unprecedented situation.

Nun Vassa writes: "In connection with the death of the locum tenens of the patriarchal throne, Hieromartyr Peter of Krutitsa, an 'Act on the lawful succession of the title of locum tenens of the Moscow patriarchal throne and the leadership of the Russian Orthodox Church after the death of Metropolitan Peter of Krutitsa' was drawn up at the Hierarchical Council of ROCOR in December, 1937. Recognizing the claims of Metropolitan Sergius (Stragorodsky) to be unlawful, the Hierarchical Council recognized Metropolitan Cyril as the lawful locum tenens, not knowing that Hieromartyr Cyril had been shot on November 20, 1937. However, in view of the persecutions the Council admitted that it was impossible openly to commemorate Metropolitan Cyril, and decreed: 'To commemorate Metropolitan Cyril as locum tenens of the Moscow patriarchal throne and head of the Russian Church at the proskomedia and in private prayers, but to refrain from proclaiming his name during the Divine services, so as not to draw upon him heavy persecutions on the part of the atheist power of the Bolsheviks. The present act is to be preserved without publication, as a witness to future times concerning the lawful succession of the leadership of the Russian Church.' Instead of openly commemorating Metropolitan Cyril's name, the Council decreed that 'the Orthodox Episcopate of the Russian [Rossijskaia] Church' should be commemorated. However, there is no more detailed explanation of this formula in the protocols of 1937.

"From what has been said we may conclude that at first 'the Orthodox Episcopate of the Russian Church' signified a concrete person, the patriarchal locum tenens Metropolitan Cyril, since his name could not be raised openly. This formula signified at the same time also that the Hierarchical Council did not recognize Metropolitan Sergius to be the head of the Russian Church."

And so by the end of 1937, the Church's descent into the catacombs, which had begun in the early 20s, was completed. From now on, with the external administrative machinery of the Church destroyed, it was up to each bishop - sometimes each believer - individually to preserve the fire of faith, being linked with his fellow Christians only through the inner, mystical bonds of the life in Christ. Thus was the premonition of

Hieromartyr Bishop Damascene fulfilled: “Perhaps the time has come when the Lord does not wish that the Church should stand as an intermediary between Himself and the believers, but that everyone is called to stand directly before the Lord and himself answer for himself as it was with the forefathers!”

This judgement was supported by ROCOR at its Second All-Emigration Council in 1938: “Since the epoch we have lived through was without doubt an epoch of apostasy, it goes without saying that for the true Church of Christ a period of life in the wilderness, of which the twelfth chapter of the Revelation of St. John speaks, is not, as some may believe, an episode connected exclusively with the last period in the history of mankind. History show us that the Orthodox Church has withdrawn into the wilderness repeatedly, from whence the will of God called her back to the stage of history, where she once again assumed her role under more favourable circumstances. At the end of history the Church of God will go into the wilderness for the last time to receive Him, Who comes to judge the quick and the dead. Thus the twelfth chapter of Revelation must be understood not only in an eschatological sense, but in a historical and educational sense as well: it shows up the general and typical forms of Church life. If the Church of God is destined to live in the wilderness through the Providence of the Almighty Creator, the judgement of history, and the legislation of the proletarian state, it follows clearly that she must forego all attempts to reach a legalization, for every attempt to arrive at a legalization during the epoch of apostasy inescapably turns the Church into the great Babylonian whore of blasphemous atheism. The near future will confirm our opinion and prove that the time has come in which the welfare of the Church demands giving up all legalizations, even those of the parishes. We must follow the example of the Church prior to the Council of Nicaea, when the Christian communities were united not on the basis of the administrative institutions of the State, but through the Holy Spirit alone.”

Perhaps the most striking and literal example of the Church’s fleeing into the wilderness is provided by Bishop Amphilochius of Yenisei and Krasnoyarsk, who in 1930 departed into the Siberian forests and founded a catacomb skete there in complete isolation from the world. However, the Catacomb Church was still able to issue decrees in this period, such as the following anathema attached to the Order for the Triumph of Orthodoxy in Josephite parishes: “To those who maintain the mindless renovationist heresy of sergianism; to those who teach that the earthly existence of the Church of God can be established by denying the truth of Christ; and to those who affirm that serving the God-fighting authorities and fulfilling their godless commands, which trample on the sacred canons, the patristic traditions and the Divine dogmas, and destroy the whole of Christianity, saves the Church of Christ; and to those who revere

the Antichrist and his servants and forerunners, and all his minions, as a lawful power established by God; and to all those... who blaspheme against the new confessors and martyrs (Sergius of Nizhni-Novgorod, Nicholas of Kiev and Alexis of Khutyn), and to... the renovationists and the other heretics – **anathema.**”

Again, Divine Providence convened a Council of the Catacomb Church in July, 1937, in the depths of Siberia:- “In the last days of July, 1937, in the Siberian town of Ust-Kut, on the River Lena (at its juncture with the River Kut), in the re-grouping section of the house of arrest, there met by chance: two Metropolitans, four Bishops, two Priests and six laymen of the secret Catacomb Church, who were on a stage of their journey from Vitim to Irkutsk, being sent from Irkutsk to the north.

“It was difficult to anticipate a similarly full and representative gathering of same-minded members of the Church in the near future. Therefore those who had gathered decided immediately to open a ‘Sacred Council’, in order to make canonical regulations concerning vital questions of the Catacomb Church. The time of the Council was, as it seemed, limited to four hours, after which the participants in the Council were sent in different directions.

“The president was Metropolitan John (in one version: “Bishop John”), and the Council chose the layman A.Z. to be secretary. The resolutions of the Council were not signed: A.Z. gave an oath to memorize the decisions of the Council and to pass on to whom it was necessary whatever he remembered exactly, but not to speak at all about what he confused or could not remember exactly. A.Z. in his time succeeded in passing on the memorised decisions of the Church. His words were written down and became Canons of the Church. Among these Canons were some that are especially necessary for the Church:

“1. The Sacred Council forbids the faithful to receive communion from the clergy legalized by the anti-Christian State.

“2. It has been revealed to the Sacred Council by the Spirit that the anathema-curse hurled by his Holiness Patriarch Tikhon is valid, and all priests and Church-servers who have dared to consider it as an ecclesiastical mistake or political tactic are placed under its power and bound by it.

“3. To all those who discredit and separate themselves from the Sacred Council of 1917-18 – **Anathema!**

“4. All branches of the Church which are on the common trunk – the trunk is our pre-revolutionary Church – are living branches of the Church

of Christ. We give our blessing to common prayer and the serving of the Divine Liturgy to all priests of these branches. The Sacred Council forbids all those who do not consider themselves to be branches, but independent from the tree of the Church, to serve the Divine Liturgy. The Sacred Council does not consider it necessary to have administrative unity of the branches of the Church, but unity of mind concerning the Church is binding on all.”

Thus Sergius was to be condemned, not only because he was a usurper of ecclesiastical authority (although he was that), nor because he violated the sacred canons (although he did that), but because he imposed on the Church an heretical attitude towards the antichristian authorities. As Hieromartyr Bishop Mark (Novoselov) said during interrogation: “I am an enemy of Soviet power – and what is more, by dint of my religious convictions, since Soviet power is an atheist power and even anti-theist. I believe that as a true Christian I cannot strengthen this power by any means... [There is] a petition which the Church has commanded to be used every day in certain well-known conditions... The purpose of this formula is to request the overthrow of the infidel power by God... But this formula does not amount to a summons to believers to take active measures, but only calls them to pray for the overthrow of the power that has fallen away from God.”

Again, in another catacomb document dating from the 1960s we read: “Authority is given by God in order to preserve and fulfil the law... But how should one look on the Soviet authority, following the Apostolic teaching on authorities [Romans 13]? In accordance with the Apostolic teaching which we have set forth, one must acknowledge that the Soviet authority is not an authority. It is an anti-authority. It is not an authority because it is not established by God, but insolently created by an aggregation of the evil actions of men, and it is consolidated and supported by these actions. If the evil actions weaken, the Soviet authority, representing a condensation of evil, likewise weakens... This authority consolidates itself in order to destroy all religions, simply to eradicate faith in God. Its essence is warfare with God, because its root is from Satan. The Soviet authority is not authority, because by its nature it cannot fulfil the law, for the essence of its life is evil.

“It may be said that the Soviet authority, in condemning various crimes of men, can still be considered an authority. We do not say that a ruling authority is totally lacking. We only affirm that it is an anti-authority. One must know that the affirmation of real power is bound up with certain actions of men, to whom the instinct of preservation is natural. And they must take into consideration the laws of morality which have been inherent in mankind from ages past. But in essence this authority systematically commits murder physically and spiritually. In reality a

hostile power acts, which is called Soviet authority. The enemy strives by cunning to compel humanity to acknowledge this power as an authority. But the Apostolic teaching on authority is inapplicable to it, just as evil is inapplicable to God and the good, because evil is outside God; but the enemies with hypocrisy can take refuge in the well-known saying that everything is from God. This Soviet anti-authority is precisely the collective Antichrist, warfare against God...”

CONCLUSION. THE COST OF SERGIANISM

Even patriarchal sources have spoken about the falsity of Sergius' declaration, the true confession of those who opposed him, and the invalidity of the measures he took to punish them. Thus: "Amidst the opponents of Metropolitan Sergius were a multitude of remarkable martyrs and confessors, bishops, monks, priests... The 'canonical' bans of Metropolitan Sergius (Stragorodsky) and his Synod were taken seriously by no one, neither at that time [the 1930s] nor later by dint of the uncanonicity of the situation of Metropolitan Sergius himself..." And again: "The particular tragedy of the Declaration of Metropolitan Sergius consists in its principled rejection of the podvig of martyrdom and confession, without which witnessing to the truth is inconceivable. In this way Metropolitan Sergius took as his foundation not hope on the Providence of God, but a purely human approach to the resolution of church problems... The courage of the 'catacombniks' and their firmness of faith cannot be doubted, and it is our duty to preserve the memory of those whose names we shall probably learn only in eternity..."

If Metropolitan Sergius thought that his betrayal of the True Orthodox Christians would "save the Church", the next few years would prove him terribly wrong. From 1935 the Bolsheviks began to repress all the clergy, sergianist as well as True Orthodox. According to Russian government figures, in 1937 alone 136,900 clergy were arrested, of whom 106,800 were killed; while between 1917 and 1980, 200,000 clergy were executed and 500,000 others were imprisoned or sent to the camps. The rate of killing slowed down considerably in the following years. In 1939 900 clergy were killed, in 1940 - 1100, in 1941 - 1900, in 1943 - 500. In the period 1917 to 1940 205 Russian hierarchs "disappeared without trace"; 59 disappeared in 1937 alone. By 1939 there were only four bishops of the sergianist church at liberty, and only a tiny handful of churches open in the whole country...

The situation was no better with regard to churches. There were no churches at all in Belorussia (Kolarz), "less than a dozen" in Ukraine (Bociurkiw), and a total of 150-200 in the whole of Russia. In all, the numbers of functioning Orthodox churches declined from 54,692 in 1914 to 39,000 at the beginning of 1929 to 15, 835 on April 1, 1936.

And yet the census of 1937 established that one-third of city-dwellers and two-thirds of country-dwellers still confessed that they believed in God. Stalin's plan that the Name of God should not be named in the country by the year 1937 had failed...

But what of the future? What hopes did the Christians of the Catacomb

Church nurture with regard to a deliverance from their terrible sufferings? If some, like Bishop Maximus of Serpukhov, were pessimistic about the future, thinking that the very last days of the world had been reached, others prophesied the resurrection of Holy Russia before the end, such as Bishop Victor of Glazov. Eldress Agatha of Belorussia, who was starved to death by the authorities in 1939 at the age of 119, told her spiritual children concerning the Soviet Church: "This is not a true church. It has signed a contract to serve the Antichrist. Do not go to it. Do not receive any Mysteries from its servants. Do not participate in prayer with them." And then she said: "There will come a time when churches will be opened in Russia, and the true Orthodox Faith will triumph. Then people will become baptized, as at one time they were baptized under St. Vladimir. When the churches are opened for the first time, do not go to them because these will not be true churches; but when they are opened the second time, then go - these will be the true churches. I will not live to see this time, but many of you will live to this time. The atheist Soviet authority will vanish, and all its servants will perish..."

However, the immediate outlook at the end of the thirties was bleak indeed. E.L., writing about Hieromartyr Bishop Damascene, comments: "He warmed the hearts of many, but the masses remained... passive and inert, moving in any direction in accordance with an external push, and not their inner convictions... The long isolation of Bishop Damascene from Soviet life, his remoteness from the gradual process of sovietization led him to an unrealistic assessment of the real relations of forces in the reality that surrounded him. Although he remained unshaken himself, he did not see... the desolation of the human soul in the masses. This soul had been diverted onto another path - a slippery, opportunistic path which led people where the leaders of Soviet power - bold men who stopped at nothing in their attacks on all moral and material values - wanted them to go... Between the hierarchs and priests who had languished in the concentration camps and prisons, and the mass of the believers, however firmly they tried to stand in the faith, there grew an abyss of mutual incomprehension. The confessors strove to raise the believers onto a higher plane and bring their spiritual level closer to their own. The mass of believers, weighed down by the cares of life and family, blinded by propaganda, involuntarily went in the opposite direction, downwards. Visions of a future golden age of satiety, of complete liberty from all external and internal restrictions, of the submission of the forces of nature to man, deceitful perspectives in which fantasy passed for science... were used by the Bolsheviks to draw the overwhelming majority of the people into their nets. Only a few individuals were able to preserve a loftiness of spirit. This situation was exploited very well by Metropolitan Sergius..."

Sergius has had many apologists. Some have claimed that he "saved

the Church” for a future generation, when the whirlwind of the persecution had passed. This claim cannot be justified, as we have seen. It was rather the Catacomb Church, which, as Alexeyev writes, “in a sense saved the official Church from complete destruction because the Soviet authorities were afraid to force the entire Russian Church underground through ruthless suppression and so to lose control over it.” As St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco wrote: “The Declaration of Metropolitan Sergius brought no benefit to the Church. The persecutions not only did not cease, but sharply increased. To the number of other accusations brought by the Soviet regime against clergy and laymen, one more was added – non-recognition of the Declaration. At the same time, a wave of church closings rolled over all Russia... Concentration camps and places of forced labor held thousands of clergymen, a significant part of whom never saw freedom again, being executed there or dying from excessive labors and deprivations.”

Others have tried to justify Sergius by claiming that there are two paths to salvation, one through open confession or the descent into the catacombs, and the other through compromise. Sergius, according to this view, was no less a martyr than the Catacomb martyrs, only he suffered the martyrdom of losing his good name. However, this view comes close to the “Rasputinite” heresy that there can be salvation through sin – in this case, the most brazen lying, the sacrifice of the freedom and dignity of the Church and Orthodoxy, and the betrayal to torments and death of one’s fellow Christians! Thus Hieromartyr Sergius Mechev was betrayed by “Bishop” Manuel Lemeshevsky. And more generally, Metropolitan Sergius’ charge that all the catacomb bishops were “counter-revolutionaries” was sufficient to send them to their deaths.

Sergianists are constantly trying to prove that the declaration of Metropolitan Sergius, though disastrous for the Church, was nevertheless motivated by the purest of feelings. Apart from the inherent improbability that an action motivated by the purest of feelings – and therefore inspired by the Grace of God – would bring disaster, both physical and spiritual, to thousands, if not millions of people, we have seen that Sergius was an opportunist from the beginning, from well before the revolution.

Further proof of this is provided in the *Memoirs* of Princess Natalya Vladimirovna Urusova: “The personality of Metropolitan Sergius was of the basest, crawling before the authorities. Many people asked each other: ‘Does Metropolitan Sergius really take part in the persecutions and the destruction of churches?’ Some did not admit that he took an active part in this, but, unfortunately, they were wrong. He completely sold himself to satan. I can cite a case personally known to me which confirms the fact of his participation in these works.

"In the church of St. Nicholas the Big Cross there chanted in the choir a young girl, very humble and nice. The whole of her family was religious, and consequently did not recognize the sergianist church. We got to know each other, and I and Andryusha would often go to their dacha near Moscow. Verochka worked in the main post office in Moscow, she was welcoming and good-looking. Once there came to her department on service matters a GPU boss. He was attracted to her and began to talk with her. To her horror and that of her family, he asked for their address. Unexpectedly he came to the dacha, thoroughly frightening everyone, of course. After all, it was impossible ever to know the intentions of these terrible people. Having said hello, he brought out a box of pastries, which no simple mortal could get at that time, and gave it to Verochka, asking her to accept him as a guest. He began to come often and to court her. Probably everyone was quietly and secretly crossing themselves, praying to be delivered from this guest. But there was nothing to be done. He looked about 30, with quite an interesting appearance. Almost immediately they set off on a walk without Verochka's father and mother, while Andryusha and I hurried to leave. Verochka said that she could have liked him, but the single thought that he was not only the boss of a GPU department, but, as he himself said, in charge of Church affairs, repulsed and horrified her. He proposed to her. She refused. 'How can I be your wife, when you are not only not a believer, but a persecutor of the Church, and I can never under any circumstances agree with that.' During their conversations he tried by every means to draw her away from faith in God, but she was unbending, the more so in that she was one of the beloved spiritual children of the murdered Fr. Alexander. He did not give up, but threatened to shoot her and himself. Moreover, he once even got out his revolver and pointed it at her. He continued to visit her. The family's situation was terrible. They couldn't think of sleeping or eating. They spoke only about one thing: how it would all end, with his taking revenge or his leaving them in peace? Verochka rushed around like a trapped bird trying to extricate herself from the claws of a hawk. Once when she was working (at the post office) she was summoned and given a note to go immediately to the GPU at the Lubyanka... It turned out to be his office. He ordered her to take up the telephone receiver. Then he took up another and summoned Metropolitan Sergius. "Listen to the conversation," he told her. The conversation was about the destruction of one of the churches in Moscow. Sergius not only did not register any protest, but took part in this terrible affair and gave his agreement. "Did you hear?" said the boss. "That's the kind of clergy you bow down to." She replied that this conversation could not shake her faith in God, and that even before she had not recognized Metropolitan Sergius, while now she was convinced that she had not been mistaken about him... "

Sergius made the basic mistake of forgetting that it is God, not man, Who saves the Church. This mistake almost amounts to a loss of faith in

the Providence and Omnipotence of God Himself. The faith that saves is the faith that “with God all things are possible” (Matthew 19.26). It is the faith that cries: “Some trust in chariots, and some in horses, but we will call upon the name of the Lord our God” (Psalms 124.8). This was and is the faith of the Catacomb Church, which, being founded on “the Rock, which is Christ” (I Corinthians 10.7), has prevailed against the gates of hell.

But Sergius’ “faith” was of a different, more “supple” kind, the kind of which the Prophet spoke: “Because you have said, ‘We have made a covenant with death, and with hell we have an agreement; when the overwhelming scourge passes through it will not come to us; for we have made lies our refuge, and in falsehood we have taken shelter’; therefore thus says the Lord God,... hail will sweep away the refuge of lies, and waters will overwhelm the shelter. Then your covenant with death will be annulled, and your agreement with hell will not stand; when the overwhelming scourge passes through you will be beaten down by it...” (Isaiah 28.15, 17-19)

A Catacomb Appeal of the period wrote: “May this article drop a word that will be as a burning spark in the heart of every person who has Divinity in himself and faith in our One Lord, God and Saviour Jesus Christ. Beloved brethren! Orthodox Christians, peace-makers! Do not forget your brothers who are suffering in cells and prisons for the word of God and for the faith, the righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ, for they are in terrible dark bonds which have been built as tombs for all innocent people. Thousands and thousands of peace-loving brothers are languishing, buried alive in these tombs, these cemeteries; their bodies are wasting away and their souls are in pain every day and every hour, nor is there one minute of consolation, they are doomed to death and a hopeless life. These are the little brothers of Christ, they bear that cross which the Lord bore. Jesus Christ received suffering and death and was buried in the tomb, sealed by a stone and guarded by a watch. The hour came when death could not hold in its bonds the body of Christ that had suffered, for an Angel of the Lord coming down from the heavens rolled away the stone from the tomb and the soldiers who had been on guard fled in great fear. The Lord Jesus Christ rose from the dead. But the thunder will also strike these castles where the brothers languish for the word of God, and will smash the bolts where death threatens men...”

*May 19 / June 1, 2012.
Apodosis of the Ascension of the Lord.*